

FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD

In our Bible Studies this winter we are going to begin by studying the First Epistle of John. We will not spend time going into details of authorship or where it was written, except to state that it is generally agreed that this epistle was written by John, the beloved disciple, the apostle, that in all probability it was written at Ephesus to the churches over which John had the oversight. Some of us recently had the privilege of visiting Ephesus and standing around the traditional site of the tomb of St. John which, in all probability, in this case is well authenticated and genuine. It was a very wonderful moment.

In his epistle John is concerned as a Pastor with the wellbeing of those entrusted to his care and the whole letter betrays this concern for the spiritual health of the members of the family. Our first study is entitled

"HOW IT BEGAN AND HOW IT BEGINS"

We are going to concentrate this evening on just one verse and on the challenge that comes to us from the consideration of it. If there is going to be fellowship there must first be faith and in this opening verse St. John reveals how faith came into his own heart and life. And if this is the way in which faith came into the heart and life of St. John then surely there will be lessons for us to learn, how that faith will not only come to us but how we must make quite certain that it comes to others. So let us examine this first verse which reads in the A.V. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life." I want us to note these three phrases "we have heard" "we have seen, we have looked upon" and "we have handled". In passing and by way of introduction we can note that St. John describes Jesus Christ as being "from the beginning" indicating his belief in the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ, and also that he describes Him as "the Word of life". This is the same title given to Jesus Christ at the beginning of St. John's Gospel and is a very suggestive title; for words reveal what is in the mind and express what is in the heart of the one who utters them; so Jesus Christ reveals and expresses what is in the heart and mind and character of God for the people whom He has created and whom He would redeem. He is described as the Word of life because in Him there is life and those who come to trust in Him and receive Him become partakers of that life, that newness of life which is God's intention for men into whose experience there has come the malady of sin. But let us get back to our theme "How it began and how it begins" and I would suggest three tremendous words can be extracted from this first verse. If we take the first phrase "That which we have heard" this speaks to us of:-

A. THE DECLARATION THE GOSPEL MUST HAVE

There must be an audible and vocal communication. This is what had sparked off St. John's experience. He listened to what Jesus Christ had to say, was arrested by it and finally convinced by it. So, in the experience of St. John in his way to faith, there is a primacy given to the spoken word. How desperately we need to recapture this realization that if people are going to believe in Christ then they must hear about Him and they must know about Him. Paul writing in Romans 10:14 writes "how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? how shall they hear without a preacher?" The spoken word, the preached word has a vital place in the bringing to faith of the unbeliever. St. Paul in I Corinthians 1:21 writes "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." But if this is so then there are three points that we have to note concerning the spoken word:-

- (a) The audience for the message must be secured So much of our

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speaking, so much of our preaching never reaches those for whom it is destined. We preach the Gospel within the four walls of our churches to a congregation which has very largely heard the Gospel already a thousand times. People that need to hear the Gospel are usually outside the church so either they must be brought into the church or the church must take it to the people where they are. This is a simple but obvious fact that most Christians have never really grasped. There simply must be an audience secured for the preaching of the word of God. The responsibility for this rests upon the whole church, it is not the minister's responsibility but the responsibility of the whole church. Every single church member is involved: the responsibility must be taught and the opportunity must be given. Here in St. George's, from we do this with our monthly Guest Services as far as bringing people to the church, and we do have the opportunity once a month of bringing others to where they can hear the Gospel preached: but there is an equal need that we should take the Gospel to where people are. In the recent Ministers' Conference Mr. Jan Leitch in his contribution to the series "Communicating With Youth" stressed that the Gospel must be verbalized and vocalized. We simply must open our mouths and speak. The audience must be secured then and then secondly:-

(b) The accuracy must be stressed In II Corinthians 5:20 Paul says "We are ambassadors for Christ". We are not to invent the message we are proclaiming it. This means that the truths of God have to be learned otherwise the Spirit of God, who is himself the Spirit of Truth, will not own or bless the message that we speak or that we preach. I am convinced that this is one reason why the sense of the presence of the Spirit of God is totally absent from many churches. What is said from the pulpit bears no correspondence whatsoever to what is in the mind of God revealed in Jesus Christ. But not only must we learn the truths of God but the tone of voice that we use must be in keeping with the character of God. Sometimes we can misrepresent the Gospel of the grace and love of God just as badly by the way in which we speak as by the content of what we say. It is called in the Bible "good news" and yet in many churches the good news so-called is proclaimed and preached in tones of abysmal gloom. It is the message of the grace and love of God, it ought to bring a glow to our face and a smile to our lips. The accuracy of the message must be stressed and then:-

(c) The authority The message must be sensed. We read of our Lord "he taught them as having authority and not as the scribes" Matthew 7:29. And here we are thrown right back upon the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. We dare not and must not take the Holy Spirit for granted, ultimately he alone is the one who can bring anybody to faith in Christ and he must have a life that he is able to use, through which his authority and power can operate. There is a monopoly here that the Christian must respect. The work of conviction and of conversion is something we are not asked to do: it is something however that we are told the Holy Spirit will do when he comes. In John 16:8 we read "when he is come, he will convict". Those who become Christians are born of the Spirit. I remember Bishop Taylor Smith saying "I don't go about trying to convert people". What a relief that was to me, I thought that was my job, but it was not my job it's the job of the Holy Spirit. But if there is a monopoly we must respect there is a ministry here we can restrict. We have to face the fact that the Holy Spirit can be grieved. Paul warns us in Ephesians 4:30 "grieve not the Spirit" and we grieve the Holy Spirit when we fail to allow him to do in us and to be in us that for which he has been given.

So there is A Declaration The Gospel Must Have and in this way we will use what we might call the audible channel of communication. But John goes on to speak not simply of that which he heard but he writes of "that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon," If there is a declaration on the Gospel must have there is also:-

B. AN ILLUSTRATION THE GOSPEL WILL NEED

And here we are taken a step further because John speaks not only of what he heard but of what he saw and beheld. The two words are similar and yet different: the word 'see' refers simply to the act of looking, the word translated 'looked upon' refers to the intensity of the gaze. But the main point I would stress is this: that while we just want

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people to listen and that's the beginning and end of it, all, they want to look as well. After all we are living in a day when visual aids are regarded as essential and when the most powerful factor in shaping the minds of people in the realm of mass media is television. It is powerful because it appeals not simply to the ear but also to the eye. The Church and Jesus Christ and the Gospel desperately need visual aids. When we think back to the life of our Lord and what lies behind these words of St. John "that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon" we do well to ask ourselves if what John saw can still be seen, because after all every Christian is another incarnation of Jesus Christ. What did John see? What was it he saw that brought him to faith and then into fellowship? I think there were three things. First of all he saw:-

(a) The activity of the love of Christ As evangelicals we glory in John 3:16 "God so loved the world that he gave" but we seldom live that out or demonstrate it. I wonder if you recall the definition of evangelism that I have quoted more than once, as "the offering of the whole Christ, for the whole man, by the whole Church to the whole world." This reflection of the love of God and the concern of God was seen in the ministry and miracles of our Lord and that concern covered the whole man. Evangelicals have distorted the message and tried to make out that the Gospel is simply concerned with the souls of men, but the will of God is concerned with the whole of man. I Thessalonians 5:23 tells us this "I pray God your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless". Our Lord said "even the very hairs of your head are all numbered" Matthew 10:30. Sanitation as well as salvation is the concern of God; a good house as well as a clean heart. When I think of the surging tide of Communism I sometimes think of the words to a decadent nation spoken by Jesus Christ recorded in Matthew 21:43 "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Is the one reason why Communism makes an appeal to so many of the backward nations simply this, that Communism at least professes a concern for the wellbeing of the whole man. It is not enough to talk about the love of God, we must show the love of God, and love can be seen in action. One of the most repeated words describing the attitude of Jesus Christ to the world in which He lived is the word 'compassion'. Out of that compassion He gave of His time, of His strength, of His very life. Love is made visible in its actions as well as its words. John had seen the love of God in action in Christ. Does the world today see the love of God in action in us? Not only had he seen the activity of the love of Christ, he had seen:-

(b) The adequacy of the power of Christ Then, as now, Christ came face to face with the problems that baffled the minds of men. He faced the vast area of human need but He brought to their need a power that healed the hurts of men. We know that neither humanism nor materialism can solve the basic needs of men; they need salvation in Christ, they need a power, a life different from their own, resources greater than their own. The point is, can that power be seen in our lives? We claim that we are saved but what have we been saved from? What are we being saved for? The promise given at the birth of Christ was "Thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins" but the world wants to see the adequacy of the power of Christ to do just exactly that which he claimed he could do. Do they see the adequacy of His power in your life and mine? But the third thing that John had seen that brought him along the path to faith and then into fellowship was that he had also seen:-

(c) The agony of the Passion of Christ This John would never forget, the very Cross itself. How Christ suffered there, what Christ shouldered there. John realized that our Lord's complete identification with the needs of men was an identification with the problem of man's sin and there on the Cross He was bearing the burden in that great redemptive act of Divine Love. But how far have we accepted the price too of a similar identification that we too are getting under the burden not simply of the material needs of men, not simply of their social needs but of their spiritual needs? How far are we really under the burden of the sin of the world? Not in that uniquely redemptive sense in which Christ bore that burden but in an identification with the will of God in Christ which means that we too will have to suffer, and

Passage read St. John 1:1-14 Studied I John 1:2 13th October, 1971

FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD

Our first Bible Study was entitled "How It Began And How It Begins" and we described experimentally how faith came to St. John himself, that faith which precedes fellowship, and how that faith must still come to people today. Audibly, visually and tangibly the truth of God in Christ must be presented. Today, in our Bible Study, we want to take a step further back and to examine the historical reality that lies behind God's revelation of Himself in Christ. What we call the Incarnation. As we read this epistle we find what a real place this has in the thinking of St. John as the very foundation upon which both faith and fellowship rest. In v.1 John had spoken of "That which was from the beginning of the Word of life" in the R.S.V. you will notice that in the word of life the word "word" is spelt with a small 'w'. This indicates a division of opinion amongst commentators and scholars as to what John is referring to. Is he referring to Christ as the Word of life as he does in St. John's gospel chapter 1 or is he referring to the gospel as the word of life? Commentators are divided on this: I personally feel that he is referring to Christ as the Word of life, the Word of God that imparts life. But ultimately the difference is purely technical because the Gospel is Christ, Who is the Word.

In v.2 however St. John moves quite emphatically on to the historical event of the Incarnation and describes Christ as "the life was manifested which was with the Father and was manifested unto us." Here we see a close parallel between the opening verses of John's epistle and John's gospel. So tonight in our study I want to concentrate on the Incarnation of Christ which is described in John 1:14 in these words "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth." We can associate with these words the accounts in St. Matthew's gospel and in St. Luke's gospel: all three accounts support the claim that the birth of Jesus Christ was unique. It was said of Him while He was alive "never man spake like this man" we could add "never was man born like this man" We live in a time when in some quarters the truth of the Incarnation is not merely being questioned but being denied. This is of course no new thing as this epistle of St. John reveals, but to deny it undermines one of the basic aspects of our Christian faith, namely, that Jesus Christ was God Incarnate, both truly God and truly man. I want therefore to look at this truth and there are three statements which sum up what I have to say.

A. THE POSSIBILITY OF THE INCARNATION MUST BE ADMITTED

And that on two grounds; the first ground is:-

(a) In the light of the bounds or limits of man's knowledge Let us face the fact that man does not know everything. Man does not know everything about this world to begin with, nor does man know everything about God. To say that the Incarnation was impossible assumes that man knows everything both about this created universe and about the God who created it, and that statement is of course absurd. The farthest that scepticism can go is to say that the Incarnation is improbable and we shall have more to say about that in a moment; but the bounds or limits of man's knowledge demand then that the possibility of such an event must be admitted. It is always to me a strange thing that at a time when the extent of man's own achievements is expanding so rapidly that there are those who seem anxious to set a limit of their own designing upon what the power of the Creator can do. The other comment is possibly even more pertinent; I take it from Professor Daniel Lamont of New College, Edinburgh, who deplored the way in which he said "Those who know something of a

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small part of reality claim the right to speak with authority on the whole." The folly of this can be seen if we assume that because a person knows a great deal about music that therefore that same person has the right to speak with authority about medicine. This is of course obvious nonsense. And so in the light of the bounds or limits of man's knowledge the possibility of the Incarnation taking place must be admitted - that is logical - but secondly I would observe that the possibility must be admitted not only in the light of the bounds or limits of man's knowledge but also:-

(b) In the light of the basis of man's knowledge It is a simple truth that revelation lies at the foundation of all man's knowledge of the material universe in which he lives. My knowledge of the world in which I live comes initially to me through my senses and my senses are all receptive. In gaining this knowledge of the material universe around I am a recipient through my senses of sight, sound, touch and taste etc. I receive the various impulses from without and these then my mind interprets. If you were to imagine a person whose senses were not functioning you can visualize someone who would remain always in complete ignorance of the material universe that surrounded him. So knowledge in the spiritual realm, the Christian would assert, falls into line with knowledge gained in the physical and material realm, that knowledge of the spiritual realm is initially based upon revelation. So it was that centuries ago the words were recorded in the book of Job 11:7 "Canst thou be searching find out God?" and the answer is of course, No. The truth is the very opposite, as someone has said "through God alone can God be known". Natural religion thinks in terms of man's search after God: revealed religion in terms of God's search after man.

So in the light both of the bounds of man's knowledge and in the light of the basis of man's knowledge the possibility of the Incarnation must be admitted. But we want to take our argument a step further; not only must the possibility be admitted but also:-

B. THE NECESSITY CAN BE ASSERTED

I find that wherever there is a belief in God there is at least one aspect of this belief that people are prepared to accept, namely, that God is love. This is of course a Christian concept of God but their approach to it presumably is along these lines that as love is the highest attribute in the creature, in man, if it is found in the creature it must surely be found in the Creator. The trouble is that those who say they believe in God and who go further and say they believe that God is love, they then make that belief a cushion upon which their thinking proceeds to go to sleep without going on to work out the implications of this; and anyone who knows anything at all about love knows that love is the last thing in the world to encourage sleepiness and lethargy. It is a disturbing thing: and I would support the contention that the necessity for the Incarnation can be asserted on these two grounds:-

(a) Human love demands the making of such a revelation For one of the supreme and universal characteristics of love is that it seeks to reveal itself, to express itself, whether it be the love of a child for a doll, the love of a man for a maid, the love of a mother for a child or the love of a husband for a wife. Love always seeks in word, in look, in deed to express and reveal itself to the one it loves. And this of course is exactly what Christ Himself said about the love of God in John 14:21 "He that loveth me, I will love him and will manifest myself to him." If this quality is true of human love surely we have a right to believe that it will equally be true of divine love. If God is love, then that love and that God must seek to reveal itself to the object of that love, namely, to man himself. If God does not attempt to reveal himself or his love to mankind then surely we are justified in asserting that God certainly is not love. But if human love demands the making of such a revelation surely we can take our reasoning a step further and assert that:-

(b) Human life determines the manner of such a revelation Such a revelation must be made in such a way that the mind of man can fully

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apprehend it. On what level of life could God then have acted except on the level of a man's own life. If God was to reveal himself to man surely he must do it as a man. This of course immediately takes us into the realm of the miraculous or of the supernatural. But what seems supernatural or miraculous to man is not necessarily supernatural or miraculous to God. God's love longed to reveal itself and did so at the level of life that man could most fully understand - namely, his own. Christ claimed "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" and so adequately of not completely God has revealed himself and made himself known in the person of Jesus Christ. That is the only level of life that man can really understand - his own - and God, may we say reverently, had to stoop down to man's level to achieve the purpose He had in his heart. We are conscious of this in another relationship. How often those of us who are fond of animals wish that our dogs could speak, and of course they try desperately hard to but they cannot. We speak to them and as they look at us it is obvious they are trying to understand, and they can of course understand a certain amount, but they cannot really understand us, neither can we really understand them. If we wanted to communicate in a complete way to a dog we would have to be a dog. May I recall a story that I read about some time ago which seems to me to illustrate this point perfectly. The story is told of a boy who grew up later to become a world famous naturalist; he was walking through a forest with his mother and happened to trip on an ant-heap accidentally. The normal panic stations and movements were immediately observed; the ants scurrying hither and thither picking up what remained, hurrying to repair the damage, taking everything of value into a safe place. The mother and the boy stood watching the situation and the fright and terror and busyness of the ants. The boy was passionately fond of all living things and his mother knew it and said to him "What a pity you cannot tell these ants that you love them" The boy remained thoughtful and quiet for a moment and then he replied "But, mummy, I could only tell them that if I was an ant." May we say reverently that God could only tell us that He loved us if He became a man, and this is exactly what the Incarnation is all about.

The necessity can be asserted, and we assert it emphatically. The possibility then must be admitted: the necessity can be asserted: and then finally -

C. THE AUTHORITY WILL BE ACCEPTED

If God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ both in word and in deed then the authority of Jesus Christ must be accepted as absolute. The scriptures of the New Testament phrase this in three tremendous words in the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews: GOD HATH SPOKEN. I have a very early memory of broadcasting in the days when we had to listen with crystal sets and ear-phones. It was one of the earliest if not the first of the Christmas broadcasts by the British sovereign, it was King George the 6th. He had spoken to the nation and he had spoken to the Empire, then being a father he addressed some words to the children and he said, "Children, the king is speaking to you" When you and I listen to the words of Jesus Christ it would be as if He Himself said to us "God is speaking to you" In Jesus Christ we face an authority that is absolute because it is divine, and I believe that this is the rub. It is not that people really can logically reject the concept of the Incarnation but it is that there is so much in Christ to which they object that in order to destroy His authority they reject His Deity, and to reject His Deity they deny the reality of the Incarnation. I am convinced that this is the real reason why there are those who reject the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, therefore I want to conclude this study of the Incarnation by noting two things: first of all:-

(a) The folly that rejects the truth How often we meet well meaning but, in my judgment, completely mistaken people whose attitude to spiritual truth is "Well, this is the way I look at it" as if that finishes the matter. They seem never to have taken the trouble to find out what is the way that God looks at it and that surely is much more important. As it has often been said, there are two sides to

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Studies in I John by the Rev. George B. Duncan, M.A.

Passages read Ephesians 2:11-22. I John 1:3-5. Studied I John 1:3-5

FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD

We come to our third study in the introduction to the Epistle of John. Our first two studies had as their sub title "How It Began And How It Begins" and we examined the significance of the first two verses as they threw light upon that pathway to faith that St. John himself had trodden and that we might well expect ourselves and others to tread still; that pathway to that faith that precedes or indeed if you like produces fellowship. In v.1 we considered "How it began and how it begins" viewing this experimentally and John there spoke of "that which we have heard, which we have seen, which we have handled of the word of life." In v.2 we viewed "How it began and how it begins" historically or if you like theologically. We looked at the truth of the Incarnation, stated in v.2, as the very basis of our whole Christian experience. Our third study tonight is confined really to vv. 3-5 and this study takes us a step further into our study of that fellowship which the sharing of Christian faith will produce, that partnership, that togetherness, that participation with others of a like faith which is so vital a part in Christian living. We do well to remind ourselves that the Christian experience is never portrayed in scripture as being lived in isolation but always in relationship to other Christians as well as to God. Many Christians are happy to recognise the importance of their relationship to God; they are also prepared to recognise the responsibility of their relationship to the unconverted and unbelieving world but many who recognise these two relationships fail tragically to recognise the third relationship towards other believing Christians, and yet this is obviously vitally important. In scripture we read of "the many children of the one family whose God is God". It has indeed been well said that God never has an only child. In scripture we read of the many living stones in the one building whose foundation is Christ, or that temple of which Christ is the cornerstone. Again in scripture we read of "the many members of the body whose head is Christ" or the many sheep of the flock cared for by one Good Shepherd. Indeed the implication underlying v.3 where John writes "these things declare we unto you in order that ye also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father" is surely that the restoration of fellowship both between man and God and between man and man is indeed the ultimate purpose or goal of God's saving grace in Christ. We are familiar with the fact that sin separates man from God, the scripture tells us: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God" But of course it equally separates man from man: we are familiar with this in the experience of our own lives as children when an act of disobedience brings a cloud between ourselves and the other members of the family or our parents. And the final experience into which Christ would bring us is one in which this separation has been removed and fellowship has been restored. Our third study then takes in the last two verses of the introduction and what I have called the linking verse (v.5) which brings us into the first main thrust of what John has to say to those Christian fellowships to which he is writing, and that thrust has to do with what I have called in the last place "THE LIGHT IN WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BATHED". But let us return now to what I would like to call "our linking study" vv. 3-5 and I want us to note first:-

A. FELLOWSHIP'S DESIGN

And there are two matters that we do well to note in v.3. and the first is:-

- (a) The direction in which fellowship will look. And there are two directions. If you look at v.3 you will see that John writes of "fellowship with us" and also "fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ". Fellowship has been defined as "a living intercourse between personalities" and this living intercourse is to

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be enjoyed and to be expected from two directions. That sharing of thoughts, of wishes, of aspirations and intentions is to be first of all between myself and my God, and then secondly between myself and my fellow-believer. Indeed if you look more closely at v.3 you will realise that it is really fellowship with God that makes fellowship with man possible, for John writes "that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, in order that ye may also have fellowship with us" So fellowship is to be enjoyed and to be expected and to be looked for in these two directions. And then secondly we must note:-

(b) The expression by which fellowship will live Fellowship as we have noted has been defined as "a living intercourse between personalities" and when you look at verses 3 and 4 you will find that John is declaring what God manifested, or to put it in its correct order what God manifested John then declared. You see there is nothing passive about fellowship, there must be expression, there must be participation, there must be declaration. Bishop Taylor Smith used to love describing fellowship in the Christian life as being like a game of tennis. One person serves the ball over and the other person returns it and so the game is played. Fancy someone wanting to play tennis and standing there demanding that other people keep sending the ball over without making any effort to return the balls. Whatever else would happen that particular day, one thing would be absolutely clear and that is no game of tennis would be played and that very quickly those people sending the balls would run out of their supply. Whether it is God on the other side of the net or the Christian fellowship on the other side of the net there would be no fellowship unless we were prepared to contribute our share. And so we see what God manifests John declares and so takes the initiative in fellowship. John, in other words, opens the game by serving the ball. If we press the point further we could indeed say that John only had something to declare because God had manifested something to him first. And of course the secret of fellowship between Christians is their fellowship with God the Father. But how desperately important it is then that we should be willing either to take the initiative ourselves or to reply when others take the initiative. This may mean that provision should be made within the programme of a church which will give the opportunity for fellowship which of course will mean giving a place and indeed time for this kind of participation. Or, on the other hand, this may mean that the opportunities must be grasped by Christians whenever they occur informally even if it is simply coming out of church. The design of fellowship is clear. There are directions in which fellowship will look and there are expressions by which fellowship will live. Then secondly I want us to note what John has to say here about:-

B. FELLOWSHIP'S DELIGHTS

In v.4 he writes "these things write we unto you that your joy might be full." There are two matters of debate here as far as scholars are concerned the first centres round the question what John means when he refers to "these things write we unto you". Is he referring to what he has written or to what he is about to write? The general consensus of opinion would seem to agree that John is referring to what he has written. And again there are two possible translations of the phrase "your joy" the A.V. translates it "your joy" the R.S.V. translates the Greek "our joy" the N.E.B. captures the true sense maybe of what was in the mind of John by translating the Greek "the joy of us all" which includes your joy and our joy. What a tremendously important place joy has in the New Testament in the purpose of God and in the experience of the Christian. Dr. Griffith Thomas in his commentary points out that the phrase "fulness of joy" or "your joy may be full" occurs six times in John's writings - four times in the gospel and twice in the epistle. You remember how Paul describes joy as being the first facet of that love which is the fruit of the Spirit. Love is a happy glad some experience: the person who is in love is usually much happier than they were before. But what exactly is the form of that joy that is to be associated with fellowship? I think there are two forms that this joy takes: first of all there is:-

(a) The joy of sharing with others There is a saying that sorrows shared are sorrows halved and joys shared are joys doubled. Surely

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this is part at least of the joy of Christian fellowship. Whether it is God sharing with us his thoughts or ourselves sharing our thoughts with God, or on the human level whether it is a matter of our sharing our thoughts with another Christian or the other Christian sharing his or her thoughts with us; whatever it is that is shared - it may be a problem or a burden or it may be some discovery we have made of God's truth, or some experience we have had of God's grace, to have someone to share things with always increases the joy. What enrichment can come through this sharing. We can receive so much from others and we can contribute our own share to the enrichment of others, and what encouragement comes through this sharing maybe when we discover that we are not alone with our problems. How encouraged we are to realise this when others tell us or when we tell them how God has been dealing with us, and we can show them the way or they can show us. The joy of sharing with others. And then there is also, in this joy that fellowship has or brings:-

(b) The joy of serving with others I find that fellowship in the scriptures is tied up with service. In Philippians 1:5 Paul writes gratefully to the church there of their "fellowship in the gospel" this may refer to the work that they had done together, whether alongside or separated, or the work that they were doing, the way in which they were sharing with him in his work for the gospel and he sharing with them in their witness. Again in Philippians 3:10 Paul speaks of "the fellowship of Christ's sufferings" Paul's great desire and great longing to be identified with and involved with the work in which Christ was involved. He longed to get under the burden of the sin and the need of the world even as Christ got under that burden. But to do this alone is not nearly so meaningful as to find others alongside us sharing with us and we sharing with them: praying together; witnessing together. The first time I ever went on a Seaside Mission, many years ago at Elie in Fife, I really experienced for the first time the thrill of the joy that fellowship brings and part of it at least was the joy of serving with other Christians. The thrill of that is still fresh in my mind.

So John has something to say here not only about Fellowship's Design but also Fellowship's Delights, and then finally in our linking verse v.5 we can sense something of:-

C. FELLOWSHIP'S DEMANDS

v.5 "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all." There are those commentators who think that the phrase "God is light" refers simply to the fact that light has this as its quality that it cannot be concealed and must be seen and so God must be seen and indeed has been seen in Christ. But there are others who would link up the statement "God is light" with other associations in the word of God where light is mentioned in connection with either the character of God or the truth of God. And indeed we find that there are two main emphases; the first is that light is spoken of as truth and the second that light is spoken of as righteousness or purity. If that be so and if you and I are to have fellowship with the God who is light then obviously there are certain demands that fellowship with God will make, or indeed fellowship with God's people. First of all then there are:-

(a) Demands in the mental realm I must be willing to submit my mind to the truth of God: I must be willing to yield the way I think to what God has revealed His truth. You remember how Paul writes in II Corinthians 4:6 and puts it this way "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The darkness which is the opposite of light is the darkness of ignorance. An ignorance which indeed can breed despair. So when our Lord was born it was said which indeed can breed despair. So when our Lord was born it was said by Simeon that He was light to lighten the Gentiles" and His coming was described, in its effect, in these wonderful words that "The people which sat in darkness have seen a great light." These demands in the mental realm surely must be accepted if I am going to be in the light. I must accept the truth of God and be willing to act upon it. But there are also therefore:-

(b) Demands in the moral realm For we find that the analogy of light

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is used with ethical connotation - compare Matthew 5:16 "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works" and in John 3:19 we read "Light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil" and again in John 3:20 "Everyone that doeth evil hateth the light" and while in both these last two references light may refer to truth there is also a very real ethical undertone in what is recorded. Light therefore speaks of the righteousness, the holiness, the purity of God and this is a factor that has to be taken into account if we are going to have fellowship with God. Not that this means that we must be perfect before we can have fellowship with God because no man will ever be perfect and indeed our righteousness before God is never our own but the righteousness that we have in Christ. But it means surely this that if we are going to have fellowship with a God who is light, a God who is righteousness, a God who is holy, then we must be in the fullest sympathy with His nature and with the intentions that will arise out of that nature. Holiness, if not a matter of attainment, must at least be a matter of aspiration in our hearts and lives. We must be in the company of those "who hunger and thirst after righteousness", we must be in the company of those who are "the pure in heart" who will see God. Pure in heart, although not necessarily pure in life. Aspiration must be there; sympathy with the mind of a righteous and holy God. The perfection may not be one of achievement but one of intention. Dr. Paul Rees told the delightful story of a small boy whose father returned home one day and found his small son sitting in the garden playing at making mud pies. The father sat down exhausted and said "I'm so thirsty". The little fellow hearing his dad express his wish for a drink immediately got up and went, dirty hands and all, and filled a tumbler with cold water. His dirty hands smeared the exterior of the tumbler as he carried it back and to make quite certain that he didn't let the tumbler fall he hooked a small dirty finger over the top of the tumbler, the tip of his finger dipping down into the water and the mud gradually sinking to the bottom of the glass. Dr. Rees's comment was "that was perfection of intention if not of achievement". It is this moral demand that we have to face if we are going to have fellowship with God and it is a demand that we cannot evade.

So here we are launched into the theme of this epistle **FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD** and in this introductory study, linking the introduction with the main thrust of the letter, we have been brought face to face with three aspects of fellowship.

First ITS DESIGN

Secondly ITS DELIGHTS

Finally ITS DEMANDS

Are we prepared to meet the whole will of God for His children that we should have fellowship with the Father and fellowship with one another.

Studies in I John by the Rev. George B. Duncan, M.A.

FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD

Passage studied I John 1:6 - 2:2

3rd November, 1971

THE LIGHT IN WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BATHED

WALKING IN THE SHADOWS OR WALKING IN THE SUNSHINE

We take our title "WALKING IN THE SHADOWS OR WALKING IN THE SUNSHINE" from the references in vv. 6 and 7. In v. 6 we read of walking in darkness and in v. 7 we read of walking in the light. It would seem therefore as if the alternative is before every Christian, that of walking in the darkness or the shadows, or, walking in the light or in the sunshine. It is not difficult to see that these verses set out alternately the one way of life in contrast to the other. The shadowed path is described with the introductory words "If we say" suggesting that this life is concerned mainly with profession rather than practice, with making certain claims that apparently some people were making. The alternate verses set out conditions to be met if we are to avoid the shadows and keep in the sunshine. So the shadowed path is made up of claims that have been made by Christians; the sunshine path is found by fulfilling conditions that have been met. I must confess that these seven verses have always fascinated me but I have never found any outline or analysis that really seems to satisfy my mind in a true and accurate analysis of what St. John is saying. Commentators always seem to find the writings of John in this epistle defying analysis. However, there are profound truths here and we must seek to draw and apply to ourselves the basic points that St. John is trying to make. Let us look then first of all at the claims that some Christians had been making. No doubt all of these had a particular meaningfulness in the context of the church situation at the time in which John was writing, but they are still relevant and as we examine these three verses vv. 6, 8, and 10 we shall see that they throw a great deal of light upon a misunderstanding or deliberate rejection of the true doctrine of sin. So instead of having three headings tonight with two sub-headings to each we will have two main headings with three sub-headings to each, and our first title is:-

A. WALKING IN THE SHADOWS

And this path is the path of denial. Both Dr. Griffith Thomas and the Rev. John Stott take this as the key thought to these three verses. The denial can be a denial by deed as in v. 6 or it can be a denial by word in vv. 8 and 10. The first denial has to do with:-

(1) The consequences of sin "If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth" This is the attitude of mind which says in effect that sin no longer matters. It may well be that this attitude could be based upon the fact of what we call the finished work of Christ upon the Cross. If we are justified by faith and have peace with God does it really matter then what we do and how we live? This is a point of view that is still found today by some Christians who claim that the scripture says that we are "not under the law but under grace" - the law and the fulfilling of the law is something that is no longer an obligation upon the Christian. John deals with this pretty bluntly. First of all he notes:-

(a) The claim that they made The claim was that they were both enjoying fellowship with God and at the same time they were able to walk in darkness. Darkness, you will remember, is either the opposite of truth or in this context the opposite of holiness and righteousness. One is tempted to wonder who these people were. Were they true Christians or were they purely nominal Christians? But certainly they were those who maintained deliberately a way of life that was

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quite out of harmony with the mind and will of God, and yet, obviously, they were claiming to be Christians and to have fellowship with God. We note in contrast:-

(b) The charge they must face. And the charge is quite simply that of lying. John says in effect you cannot possibly persistently, deliberately and continually walk in darkness and at the same time claim that you are enjoying fellowship with God. The Word of God is absolutely clear on this point that sin spoils fellowship. In the Old Testament this note is struck "your sins and your iniquities have separated between you and your God and he cannot hear". In the New Testament the same note is struck "What fellowship hath light with darkness?" And you remember the tremendous words of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount when He said "If ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive you yours" and it is obvious that what our Lord is referring to there is not the forgiveness that constitutes salvation but the forgiveness that conditions fellowship. The claim that men can enjoy fellowship with God and at the same time live in rebellion against Him is just quite untrue. And if we take this attitude that sin no longer matters in the life of a Christian then we are facing this charge, that John makes here, of lying; whether with our lips or in our lives.

So this is the first peril against which John is warning those whom he delights to call "my little children". And then secondly we note that there were those whose claim had to do not so much with the consequences of sin as with:-

(ii) The corruption of sin. The element of denial in the minds of these people was no more that sin no longer mattered but that sin no longer existed. They were saying "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us". This is a fantastic claim for anybody to make and we do well to note:-

(a) The reasons for making such a claim. These reasons can be intellectual and we have progressed so far that the sinner is an insensible reason for making upon an exaggerated claim concerning what the grace of God can do. The Bible teaches us very clearly that the grace of God is sufficient for every need, and that is true but nowhere do we find any statement in the Word of God that God takes away our evil and corrupt nature. There is cleansing from the corruption - of course there is: there is counteraction against every impulse that may emerge from that corrupt nature - of course there is: but the eradication of the flesh, of the sinfulness of man is not stated in scripture. If these could be the reasons for making such a claim John is concerned to lay bare:-

(b) The results of making such a claim. He says "we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us". God's truth is not in us because God's Word will not agree with this claim and in that sense we are walking, in this context, in the darkness of error and ignorance. But the more practical and more dangerous result is that "we deceive ourselves". I like to note that John does not say we deceive anybody else but we do deceive ourselves and to be deceived is always dangerous. It means that we can expose ourselves to peril when we are not aware of it and this can lead to disaster. Occasionally I do come across Christians who make precisely this claim. They claim what we call in the language of theology "sinless perfection". But I always feel when I meet such a person making such a claim that all that I need is just five minutes with the person's wife, or husband, or child, or even maybe their cat or dog, and I will discover the truth. God's truth is that "all have sinned" and our Lord Himself told us that it was "from within, out of the heart of man" that all evil proceeds. The claim that sin no longer exists, that we deny the corruption of sin within our own personalities is to walk in the shadows.

And then we find a third denial and this denial has to do with:-

(iii) The actual committing of sin. v.10 "If we say we have not sinned we make God a liar and his word is not in us". For a long time I could not understand this verse; I couldn't imagine anybody ever saying that

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they hadn't sinned. And then suddenly one day as I was reading it - not so very long ago - I suddenly realised that we have to put the emphasis in our intonation where John, I am sure, meant it to go and if we read this verse putting the emphasis on the word 'sinned' we get the meaning "If we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and his word is not in us!" We can see here that John is concerned with people who were actually denying the fact that they had committed sin. And so we note:-

(a) The guilt men denied And the guilt means quite simply that they were not prepared to admit that there was anything wrong about what they were doing nor were they prepared to admit that anything was their fault. Today more than ever we are finding people taking this precise position and maintaining it. We call this age the age of permissiveness and what permissiveness has at its very heart is the denial of guilt. Men are changing the labels and they are saying that things that God's law condemns are not sin. You can change the labels but you don't change the stuff inside and sin in the sight of God is still sin. These men, however, were rejecting the condemnation and judgment of God, and yet God's word says that "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" And if it is true that there is a guilt that these men denied then that led inevitably to the fact of:-

(b) The grace that these men discarded If there is no guilt then there is no sin: if there is no sin there is no need for a Saviour and no need for Christ. And of course this means that these people are adopting a position which makes God a liar, which means in effect that the whole of God's plan of salvation is nothing less than a hoax and that the offer of the pool of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ is nothing but a quack remedy for an illness and malady that does not exist. What a fantastic situation and what a tragic destination for those who walk in the shadows.

But, in contrast, we in the alternate verses set out the other way of life, what I like to call:-

B. WALKING IN THE SUNSHINE

Or if we want to be truly biblical WALKING IN THE LIGHT. And one of the things that come to me with almost a sense of shock is the realisation that what we find here as the characteristics of those who fulfil certain conditions involved in walking in the light, the characteristics are almost completely the opposite from what we would expect. I want you to note first of all that for those who are walking in the light, walking in the sunshine instead of the shadows, their experience as Christians will be marked by:-

(i) A consciousness of sin v.7 "If we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all unrighteousness." Scholars are divided as to what John means by the phrase "we have fellowship one with another". There are those who think that it refers to the fellowship that men will have with God but I think the greater weight of opinion seems to take the other point of view that it means we have fellowship one with another. That is to say that Christians who are walking in the light do enjoy a fellowship with one another that is tremendously real. But I want us to note first of all that walking in the light leads to:-

(a) The discovery of need The fellowship that we have walking in the light is a fellowship of need and a fellowship of grace, that is to say walking in the light means that the light reveals all the more of a traveller of yesteryears, travelling in to an Inn on a stormy night and decided that though the Inn did not look too attractive, very inadequate rushlight and showed him the way. In the light it seemed presentable and so he slept. When the sunshine came streaming in it was very dirty the room really was. In our recent trip "In The Footsteps of St. Paul" we visited a place called Pammukale near Hierapolis. We arrived at night time at this Motel which had two most glamorous looking and heated swimming pools with artificial

lights shining among the trees and bushes. It was so attractive that some of us immediately thought in terms of a bath. In the morning when we saw the state of the water I for one would have been very hesitant to have gone in at all. What the darkness concealed the light revealed. And this is true, walking in the light means experiencing a revelation of ourselves in the light that makes us deeply conscious of the fact that we are sinners and that the sin is much more deeply ingrained than ever we think. But if there is a discovery of our need there is also a reliance upon:-

(b) The efficacy of Christ's blood Many years ago I got a little card from Bishop Taylor Smith in which he said "Press on from Calvary to Pentecost" I knew what he meant and what he meant was true and valid but in a sense that word of counsel was dangerous. You and I can never really ever move away from the Cross. The cleansing from sin referred to here has been interpreted by commentators as being either judicial or experimental and referring either to every kind of sin or the very implications of sin indwelling. The fact is that when we walk in the light we become so conscious of the sinfulness of our own hearts that we find that the Cross is all the more the one fact in our redemption to which we cling. We find this strange paradox emerging in the lives of all God's true servants that the greatest saints are those who have always felt themselves to be the greatest sinners. Rather like a child that loves drawing; in the early stages the results of that child's efforts are unrecognizable but the child is quite content but as the child progresses so the standard improves and recognition and indeed approbation may grow too but satisfaction declines. Walking in the light then means being ready and prepared to experience a consciousness of our sin. But it is not enough to be conscious of our sin and so in v.9 John goes on to speak of the second characteristic of those who walk in the light namely:-

(ii) The confession of our sin "If we confess our sin he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" Somebody once said "Keep short accounts with God" and this of course is exactly what walking in the light means. There are some Christians in some churches who go to Confession once a week. John would suggest that we never wait to confess our sins, we go at once. And here there are two thoughts, first of all:-

(a) The forgiveness we must take Some people ask for forgiveness but very seldom accept it. The person who is walking in the light knows what it is to be conscious of sin, to confess sin, and then to accept God's forgiveness and to live the forgiven life. There are some people who seem to think that God has a message of forgiveness for the unconverted but none for the converted. This is tragic and the word is absolutely clear - to cleanse us from all unrighteousness and we must not and dare not make exceptions where God makes none. But if there is a forgiveness we learn to take there is also:-

(b) A faith unless we learn to trust God is described here as being faithful, faithful that is to his promises, and righteous - righteous because having met the demands of his own law once in the person of his own Son he cannot in righteousness ask us to meet those demands ourselves. As somebody has said "God will not payment twice demand; once from my bleeding surety's hand and then again at mine."

A consciousness of sin: a confession by the sinner: and finally:-

(iii) A confidence in the Saviour John makes God's intention absolutely plain in the opening verse of chapter 2 "these things write I unto you that ye sin not" God does not want us to wallow in failure and defeat. And so John ends this introductory contrast of walking in the shadows and walking in the sunshine by speaking of:-

(a) The problem that can arise The problem that can arise "If any man sin" We may sin through carelessness, we may sin through presumption, but the tragedy of sin is it can very often bring us to despair and how many a young convert has been tempted to despair and the devil has come saying "you can't be a Christian." But here we have not simply a problem that can arise but:-

(b) The presence that can assure "We have an advocate with the Father,

even Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." There are two things that Christ is to us. First, he is our advocate, he is our representative as it were at the bar of God's justice: and he is not only our representative, our lawyer, to plead our case there but he himself is the propitiation. He is the one who in himself constitutes the grounds for our forgiveness before God. We can neither add to what Christ has done or what Christ is, nor can we take away from it. And walking in the light means becoming more and more conscious of my complete and utter dependence upon the merits of Jesus Christ in his death, resurrection and ascension. Someone has said to answer the charge which imagines that here Jesus Christ is seeking to propitiate an angry God, someone has said "It is not that propitiation wins the love of God but that the love of God provides the propitiation in Christ." Somebody has put it this way "His advocacy is valid because he himself can bear witness that the only conditions on which fellowship between God and man can be restored has actually been fulfilled, i.e. the removal of the sin by which that intercourse was interrupted." It is worth noting that John says here that Christ is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. What an amazing statement! What an amazing Saviour! Surely we can have confidence, and complete confidence, in Jesus Christ but no confidence whatsoever in ourselves. This is what it means to walk in the sunshine, in the light, knowing that we are accepted in the beloved but never for one moment accepted by God for anything in ourselves.

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FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD

Passage studied I John 2:3-11

10th November, 1971

THE LIGHT IN WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BATHED

"A WORD OF ASSURANCE"

Our last study set out the alternatives of Walking In The Light or Walking In The Dark, or as we rendered it slightly more picturesquely "WALKING IN THE SUNSHINE OR IN THE SHADOW" and you will recall that our study brought some surprising disclosures that some of the most spiritually sounding claims were the claims of those who in reality were walking in the dark; and on the other hand that the experience of walking in the light, of really enjoying fellowship with God and with His people, led to the most unexpected results in the experience of those whose hearts were set on travelling that way. The net result of all this may have been a measure of uncertainty and confusion in the minds of those to whom St. John was writing. His words may have had an unsettling effect. This seems to be a possible way in which we can link up our study tonight with what has gone before. Incidentally it was comforting to me to find that such a great scholar as Dr. Griffith Thomas says, at this point in his commentary, "It is as usual difficult to follow in order the apostle's thoughts". If such a great scholar as Dr. Griffith Thomas found it difficult to follow the order of the apostle's thoughts at this stage then we should not be unduly alarmed if we find it difficult too.

The key to this passage that is before us would seem to lie in the opening words of v.3 "hereby we know that we know him". It is important to note the different tense used behind the English translation "we know". The first is the present tense and the second the perfect tense, and this suggests that what John is saying is that here is the test by which we know now that we have come to know Him in truth at our conversion or, as the R.S.V. translates it, "by this we may be sure". We can have an assurance now of the validity of our acceptance of Him then away back at the time of our conversion. So we have titled our study as "A Word Of Assurance". I would suggest further that what John has in mind is not so much the doctrinal or theological aspects of this assurance as the practical or what we might call the evidential aspects. Theologically and doctrinally our assurance will rest upon the work, the word and the worth of Christ; and there is nothing presumptuous about being sure of our salvation because the basis of our assurance is not in us but in Him. But the point is that there should surely be something experienced in our lives from day to day which, in a sense, is confirming evidence of the reality of our Christian faith. Our Lord Himself said, "by their fruits ye shall know them". This I think is what John is driving at - certainly in the opening verses of our study. And from that note of assurance then John moves on into the experience that the Christian will have living that life. We take as our first title:

A. WHAT WE SHOULD LOOK FOR

I John 2:3-5. These verses are introduced and concluded by the words "hereby we know". When consulting scholars and commentators one finds that it is debatable as to whether we are to look back or to look on in the epistle in order to understand what John is referring to by the word "hereby". Really it would seem as if we are to look on but I want to suggest that in v.3 we look on and in v.5 we look back, and that encompassed by these two phrases "hereby we do know" will be found what we should be looking for for our assurance of the validity of our conversion experience. The first thing we are to look for is what I have called:

- (a) A loyalty to our Lord v.3 "hereby we know that we have known

him if we keep his commandments." Our obedience to Christ is regarded by John as evidence of our experience of Christ. That initial step of knowing Him experimentally was a step of faith and faith, if it is true faith, is a blend of dependence and obedience. Dependence upon Christ's work on the Cross and His word to us in scripture, but obedience to His will. The old obediences that marked our lives before our conversion have been replaced with a new obedience. We no longer walk "according to the course of this world" i.e. doing what others do; nor do we walk any longer "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" i.e. doing what we want. But now the supreme question that dominates our conduct is the question Saul of Tarsus asked in the first moments of his conversion experience "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" To claim an experimental knowledge of Christ as Saviour and to pay no regard at all to His commandments is to be branded a liar v.4. The reason for this is surely that part of the experience of the new life within which is mediated to us through the Holy Spirit is a new awareness of the claims of Jesus Christ. Above in v.2. we were reminded that Christ is "our advocate" in heaven but to balance that the scripture teaches us quite emphatically that the Holy Spirit is Christ's advocate on earth in our hearts to make actual and real in our lives the ownership of Jesus Christ, to guard His rights and His claims upon us. And if the Holy Spirit is there dwelling in us then we shall become conscious of this new obedience, this new loyalty that must dominate our conduct. The second thing that we are to look for is what I have called:-

(b) A maturity in our love v.5. "whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby we know that we are in him" We need to clarify one phrase here namely the phrase "the love of God" Some scholars say it means God's love for us; others say it means our love for God, but surely it means just exactly what it says "the love of God" - that new love which is now present in us. A new love that has been received with the new life. Compare Romans 5:5 where Paul states "the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." But the love which comes to us as a gift must then be allowed to grow and develop into what John calls later on in chapter 4:18 "a perfect love that casts out fear" a love which is marked by a complete and utter confidence in the one loved. This maturing, this growing of love into a deepening confidence will come only out of a constant and growing obedience. As we obey more and more the will of God in our lives so God will unveil more and more of His mind and will to those He has learned He can trust. This is what our Lord said in John 14:21 "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father and I will love him and will manifest myself to him." And out of that deepening insight will come a deepening love and a growing confidence in the one loved, a growing recognition of His utter worth and of His utter trustworthiness. So our assurance experimentally and practically will rest upon these two things; this will be something for ourselves and something for others. We will see in any genuine Christian life a loyalty to the Lord and a maturity in the love.

The thought of the claim stated in v.5 "hereby we know that we are in him" seems to lead John on into v.6 where we read "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." In living the Christian life John is concerned not simply with what we should be looking for but where we should be looking to, and this is our second title:-

B. WHERE WE SHOULD BE LOOKING TO

v.6 to v.8 "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself to walk even as he walked." If we have this assurance in our hearts and are prepared to claim it with our lips then this immediately commits us to a certain direction and attitude of mind. A Christian must be looking to Christ: and in that life John senses both an illustration and an obligation. First of all:-

(a) The illustration of the way we should live John is conscious of the fact that this is the life the Christian possesses - the very life of Christ - and if it is possessed it should be portrayed, and in the

living of it John finds a perfect illustration both of what obedience means and of what love is. Think for a moment how prominent a part obedience played in the life of our Lord. He taught us to pray "Thy will be done". He said of His own attitude to the will of God "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work" John 4:34: and again "I seek not mine own will but the will of the Father which hath sent me." and again "I came down from heaven not to do mine own will but the will of him that sent me" John 6:38, and in the Garden of Gethsemane he prayed "not my will but Thine be done" and on the Cross behind that shout of triumph "It is finished" there surely was the awareness and the thankfulness that He had done the will of God in His redemptive act on the Cross. All this earned for Him the testimony and tribute paid by St. Paul in Philippians 2 "that he was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." How prominent a part love played in the life of our Lord. We needn't elaborate this because this is something with which we are so familiar. John saw in the life of Christ the love of God. He was aware of the lengths to which that love would go and the extent to which that love would reach to embrace the whole world. So, in Christ there is an illustration how the Christian should live, but there is more than that there is:-

(b) There is an obligation as to how the Christian should live.

The obligation is an obligation laid upon us by Christ Himself. He said we were to be witnesses to Him - in other words we were to let others see and know of Christ both by what we said and by how we lived. We owe it to Christ. He counts upon us to do it for Himself. He has no other way of communicating to the world that needs Him except through His church. And we owe it to the world. They are looking to us to offer to them what we know of Christ, and the average unbeliever has a very good idea exactly as to what the obligation is. No wonder we are told not simply what we are to look for but where we are to look to.

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at the moment we look at Christ, and see in
the kind of life we are to live and sense in
that life. And then it would seem as if
one stage further. What is the reason for
add that the ground of our assurance should
complacency should be shattered? This
for our study and that is:-

C. WHY WE SHOULD BE LOOKING OUT

Running through all this section is an undertone of warning: we sense it in v.4 "He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him." We sense again in v.9 "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his darkness even until now." There are great issues at stake in the Christian life being lived as it ought to be lived. Assurance is important: the grounds of this assurance are vital. In what way the Christian lives is significant. Why? John has two thoughts here in this final section. First he notes:-

(a) How the Christian life is progressive One of his favourite words that he has been using right up until now is the word "walk". Walking suggests movement, direction, progress. In v.6 he speaks of walking as Christ walked: in v.11 he speaks of the walking in the light. In chapter 1:7 he spoke of those who claimed they were walking in the light. The Christian just cannot stand still. As one of my assistants said, many years ago, "living the Christian life is like riding a bicycle, if you don't keep going on you'll fall off." There is no such thing as standing still. Every Christian is either further on or further back. But behind this lies another and even more challenging thought. John is not only aware of the fact that the Christian life is progressive but also:-

(b) How productive the Christian life is If we are abiding in the light, if we are staying in the light while we walk then the results

of that kind of living will be helpful to others. John says in v.10 there will be "none occasion of stumbling" no cause for stumbling, no reason. Some uncertainty again is found here concerning the meaning of this phrase "no cause for stumbling". Does that mean that the Christian himself will not stumble? Or does it mean that he will give no cause for stumbling to others? In all probability a blend of both is really in the mind of John. If our heart is really set on walking in the light; if our attitude is one which is filled with desire to please God, then we ourselves will be saved from making many blunders and we will be saved from causing others to make blunders. But if we are walking in the darkness; if we are wandering in the dark then it does mean that we have not only lost the way ourselves but that in all probability we have also led others into the dark or we have hurt others whom we have encountered in the dark. Some Christians sometimes try to calculate how many lives they have helped to a knowledge of Christ: sometimes it might be a more salutary discipline if we tried to think of the numbers that we had hindered.

Walking in the light, in the closing verses of this section, is an expansion of what John has already referred to in v.5 "Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected." To walk in the light even as Christ walked means to walk, to live a life in which love for God and love for others is the supreme motivating force. If we do not care for others, if we do not value others, then our Christian life so-called is a complete contradiction of the life which is lived and walked, even as He walked.

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FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD

Passage studied I John 2:12-14

24th November, 1971

THE LIGHT IN WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BATHED

"SOME DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD"

INFANCY: ADOLESCENCE: MATURITY.

These three verses are fascinating in what they suggest, but they have two initial difficulties to which we must give our attention because of differences in interpretation that are found amongst scholars and commentators.

(1) What does John have in mind when he addresses this section of his epistle to those who are described as "little children" "young men" "fathers"? There are some who understand the words "little children" to be used as elsewhere in this epistle to describe all those to whom he is writing; after all John was a very old man, in all probability approaching ninety to a hundred years of age, and he was justified in calling everybody of all ages "his children". And beyond that general form of address John divides the Christians into the mature Christians whom he calls the fathers and the immature Christians whom he calls the young men. That is one interpretation. There are others who understand the words to describe those who are literally, in years of physical age, children, young men and older men. The third interpretation which to me seems the most likely is that John is identifying three kinds of Christians not in terms of physical growth but in terms of spiritual development; and that he is thinking in terms of those who are in their spiritual infancy, those who are in their spiritual adolescence and those who have reached a spiritual maturity.

(2) The other difficulty of interpretation arising from the text is to understand why John says three times "I am writing" and three other times "I have written". This difference in tense is brought out more clearly in the R.S.V. This is not so important a matter but we can note in passing three possible reasons. Some say that when John uses the phrase "I wrote" he is referring to the gospel that he had written, and when he uses the phrase "I am writing" he is referring to the epistle. Others suggest that when he uses the phrase "I wrote" he is referring to what he has already written in the epistle, and when he uses the words "I am writing" he is referring to what he is now writing and will yet write. Others suggest that John is simply using a grammatical form commonly used in Greek by which in effect both the present and aorist tenses really mean the same thing. The use of "I wrote" being the use that is called the epistolary aorist - that is to say that when the reader gets the letter what he reads has been written in the past so the writer uses the past aorist tense. This seems to me to be the most likely way in which we are to understand what John has to say. These then are the two areas of difficulty but how do we link these verses with what has gone before. We can treat them purely as a diversion or as an aside or it may be that this section has been suggested to John's mind by his repeated references, in the part of the epistle he has already written, to the Christian life as a walk, a walk suggesting progress. But progress can be thought of also in terms of growth from babyhood through adolescence into maturity and this is what John is highlighting here. The light in which the fellowship is bathed will show us the varying stages of development at which various Christians may be found; stages which incidentally have nothing to do with their physical age but their spiritual condition.

There are then three recognisable stages - infancy, adolescence and

maturity. Let us look at each in turn.

A. THE STAGE OF SPIRITUAL INFANCY

And the emphasis in the thinking and in the experience of the spiritual baby is "the pardon I have" "I write unto you little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake" (v.12) and "because you have known the Father" v.13b. The pardon I have. Evangelical Churches and Mission Halls are packed with spiritual babies. Dear folk who love the Gospel and that is about all they do love and about all they do know that the Gospel is the forgiveness of sins, and to them the Christian life holds little more than the knowledge of the forgiveness of their sins. There are two things to note here:

(a) What John finds in their experience What he finds are two tremendous truths that lie at the heart of every true conversion. The forgiveness we know we have from God and the fellowship we find we have with God. "Your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake" you have known the Father". We cannot leave out the Cross and its message of forgiveness. As that lovely chorus puts it "There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin; There's a door that is open and you may go in; At Calvary's Cross is where you begin, When you come as a sinner to Jesus". This was the message preached by the early Church and we must preach it still. Acts 2:38 "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" Acts 3:19 (after the miracle wrought at the beautiful gate Peter speaking says) "Repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out." Acts 5:31 we read again "Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" So speaks Peter. And what of Paul? "I determine to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." I Corinthians 2:2. So John here adds his voice to this universal testimony "Your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake". In the light of all that Christ is; in the light of all that Christ has done; in the light of all that Christ has promised; in his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension "your sins are forgiven" and you can look up now into the face of your Creator God and know that that cloud of guilt has been removed and you can then call him your Father. There is also here suggested not only what John finds but:-

(b) What John fears in their experience And this we believe is implied by the fact that John goes on to speak of other stages of growth and development for after birth there must come growth, and what John fears is the tragedy of arrested growth and development, where the joy that is experienced at the time of conversion can turn into sadness when no growth follows. What John fears then is the tragedy of arrested development when all the dreams that love has had for a new born child remain but dreams. I remember so vividly being asked to call and see a woman when I was vicar of St. James's, Carlisle. She was a woman forty years of age but with the mind of a child of four and I found her playing with her dolls and her crayons and her teddy bear in her room. The joy of her birth had been turned into the sadness of arrested development. The normal thing is that we should grow out of the baby stage. Compare I Peter 2:2 "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." Babes, yes, but growing out of babyhood. Compare I Corinthians 3:2 where we read of the protoat of Paul "I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk and not with meat for hitherto ye were not able to bear it." Compare Hebrews 6 vv. 1 and 2 where the writer speaks "let us go on to maturity not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and faith toward God." The fear John had was that having been born again their birth would not lead on to growth. How many Christians there are that never seem to grow. Converted - yes; born again - yes; knowing and loving what they call the Gospel - yes; but that is all, and all the dreams that God had for them remain but dreams. Birth without growth.

The second stage to which John refers is:-

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B. THE STAGE OF SPIRITUAL ADOLESCENCE

"I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one" v.13 and "because ye are strong and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." v.14. I want to suggest that the emphasis in the experience of thinking of the spiritual adolescent is "the power I need". The passivity of babyhood has given place to the activity of adolescence. Two thoughts come to mind here, first of all:-

(a) The action that fills the time of adolescence Youth is a turbulent time. There comes the first fight at school; the struggle with examinations as study becomes more serious; temptations become more subtle, more strong; life becomes more complicated; the forces to be vanquished are found to be more powerful; ambition fills the mind. Life is rather like a ship that has been built and fitted out in the quiet waters of the Clyde and then has to sail into the full strength of the Atlantic gales. So with the Christian there comes the time when the mere knowledge of the forgiveness of sins in the Cross of Christ becomes more than that and the voice is heard summoning the soul to service, to battle. "Saved to serve" is a familiar motto, and the young Christian serves with all his heart, with all the energy that he has. The Christian life becomes a battle in which we revel and every victory thrills our souls, every achievement gives satisfaction. The Christian is no longer content with dreams but dreams must be deeds, and the devil becomes a familiar foe. The action that fills the time of adolescence, and linked with that:-

(b) The asking that fills the lips of adolescence Adolescence is a time when we ask for so much. We are asking for money, asking for clothes, very occasionally asking for advice, asking for freedom. We are all familiar with that stage in natural development, and there can be in spiritual growth so often the same kind of asking - asking for power, power over sin, power in service, asking for joy, asking for peace, and how we rejoice in everything we get. But our relationship to our Lord has become very much a getting relationship, an asking relationship and just as human parental love will delight to give so divine parental love delights to give: and so we turn eagerly to the word of God to see what else there is that God has for us in Christ and whatever we find in the word of God we seek it passionately and earnestly for ourselves that we may serve Him better.

The power we need - this is the stage of the spiritual adolescent.
The pardon I have - this is the stage of the spiritual infant.
And then finally we have here:-

C. THE STAGE OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

"I write unto you fathers because ye have known him that is from the beginning." I want to suggest that the emphasis in the experience and thinking of the spiritual mature is on "the Person I know" Twice over the statement is made concerning the fathers "Ye have known him that is from the beginning" This seems to be something different from the knowledge of spiritual infancy - there it is the knowledge of a new relationship - knowing the Father and of the assurance of the love of that Father experienced in fellowship; the freedom and liberty of a child to make its way into the presence of the Father. The knowledge of him "that is from the beginning" seems to take us into a much wider and deeper experience of the very nature and being of God, of His mind, His thoughts, His intentions. The final stage of spiritual development then has this at its heart "the Person I know" There are two comments that I would make here about spiritual maturity. First of all:-

(a) The privilege of the intimacy that maturity enjoys "ye have known him" This was the cherished ambition of Paul; writing in Philippians 3:10 he heads his ambitions with these words "That I may know him" - that comes first. Before his desire to know the power of the risen life of Christ, before his desire to be identified in the fellowship of his sufferings, he wants first of all to know him, and in Philippians 3:8 he says "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" Peter tells us

that we are to "grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." As we grow older surely this is something we all experience. We experience it in family relationships. As the children get older the parents begin to share with their children things they would never have shared with them when they were kids: and so in Christian work, in the family of the fellowship of the children of God. In Christian work we find that as we grow, and develop and mature we get closer to and closer alongside those who are much older Christians than we ourselves may be. I have never forgotten when a wellknown Christian leader much older than myself spoke to me at Keswick on one occasion. I had addressed him as Mr. so-and-so, to which he replied "I think we could drop the Mr." How my heart warmed with affection and gratitude when I realised that he was treating me as one that was on the same footing, and the same level as himself. It was said of Moses that he was one whom "the Lord knew face to face" and in that connection we may recall the words recorded about Moses in Psalm 103:7 that God "made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel." That is to say that God let Moses into the inner workings of His mind; the children of Israel simply saw the result in his actions. The privilege of the intimacy that maturity enjoys with God. And then also here we see and sense:-

(b) The pressures of the responsibility that maturity receives
Fathers are not in a position to ask anybody else, they are rather in a position to be asked by others. They are not being cared for as children, they are having to care for others as children. And growing maturity leads to growing responsibility. If we are in this stage of spiritual development we shall be carrying more and more burdens of responsibility - in the realm of our prayer life, in the matter and measure of our giving, in the way and form of our Christian service - responsibility gladly accepted, gladly borne, gladly fulfilled and faithfully and diligently carried through.

Here then are three stages each with its own particular emphasis; Spiritual Infancy with the emphasis on "the pardon I have"; Spiritual Adolescence with the emphasis on "the power I need"; Spiritual Maturity with the emphasis on "the Person I know". Now these may seem like hard and fast divisions though of course it is not so. Dr. Gr. with Thomas points out in his commentary that although these may appear to us as successive stages of development yet, in a sense, they can co-exist simultaneously. There is always something of the infant in us; there is always something of the adolescent in us; but let's pray God that there must, and there will surely be a great deal of spiritual maturity about our Christian living.

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FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD

Passage studied I John 2:15-17

1st December, 1971

THE LIGHT IN WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BATHED

"THE DANGERS REVEALED BY THE LIGHT - THE WORLD"

In our last study we were examining the light shed on the different stages of Christian and spiritual development. Did this suggest to John's mind the need to pinpoint the hindrances to development and thus bring him to a study of the relationship of the Christian to the world. We can recall the teaching of our Lord in the parable of the sower, or the parable of the soils, Matthew 13:22 when our Lord spoke about the seed that fell among the thorns and commented "the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and it becometh unfruitful." Or it may be that his reference to the wicked one in the previous section suggested to his mind the dangers in that world of which that evil one has been described as "the prince" by our Lord in John 14:30. Either connection of thought is the possible link in the mind of St. John. One thing is clear, that John is conscious of the fact that what he calls "the world" constitutes an element of real danger and that fact is highlighted here and elsewhere both in this epistle and in the gospel. I want to suggest that there are three aspects of this study of "the world" that call for our consideration. We must note:-

A. THE DISCERNMENT THE CHRISTIAN WILL REQUIRE

i.e. a discernment as to what is meant by "the world" that John says we are not to love: we are not to love the world nor the things that are in the world. There are two comments that I would make; the first is:-

(a) The way in which the world can be defined John is obviously not referring to the people in the world. We are told in John 3:16 that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life" and if God so loved the world and still loves the world, i.e. the people in the world, then surely it would be wrong for us not to love them. Also it is obviously not the world of nature, which is the creation of God. Christ speaks of the beauty of the flowers, He speaks of God's command for the birds. Surely we can love the world of nature and enjoy the beauty of a countryside, of a sunset. What then does "the world" mean in the mind of John as he is writing here? Surely it is that part of the life of man which is totally incompatible with the mind of God. It may be an attitude of character of God. It may be an attitude of man, it may be the product of man's activity or the way in which he is occupied, but the point is that it is utterly inconsistent with the will of God and is the product of the unregenerate nature of fallen man. It is inconsistent with the truth of God, the mind of God: it is the product of man, the sinner, the rebel. As someone has said "the world" is "human society in so far as it is organised on wrong principles and characterised by base desires, false values and egoism". Dr. Griffith Thomas comments "the world is not so much a sphere as an atmosphere and includes everything which is sinful or likely to be so". The world then is that moral order, that way of life, that scale of values, those customs, pursuits or interests which are not in harmony with the mind and will of God. The second comment I would make concerns:-

(b) The way in which the world is described John gives three samples which throw light upon what he means by "the world". The translation in the A.V. here is somewhat misleading owing to the changed meaning of the words used. The N.E.B. translation is possibly

more helpful. The word translated "lust" in both the A.V. and R.S.V. has to our minds the connotation of sensual or even sexual desire, but the word in the Greek means simply "desire" or "longing". The word "flesh" has also a restricted association in our minds, but the word translated from the Greek means "the sinful nature of man" that self-principle within unregenerate man and which remains in regenerate man. Worldliness in the mind of John then is a life in which the desires of myself, apart from God, dictate and determine what I do, where I go, what I seek. It is a life based upon self-gratification, self-indulgence - the desires of myself. It is also a life in which the heart is captivated and then motivated by the outward show of things. This is what John is getting at when he speaks of the desire of the eyes. The things that are seen to be attractive and impressive without any consideration of their real worth in the sight of God, or indeed if there is any place for them in my life in the will of God. "The desires of the eyes" is a phrase used to describe the kind of attitude which wants whatever it sees without stopping to ask whether it is worth having in the evaluation that Christ puts upon life. The phrase "the pride of life" means a life in which ostentation is evident; the desire to impress others, to gain their attention, their approbation, whether or not it be merited or deserved. The attitude which always wants to be noticed; all this is utterly alien to the mind and character of God and to the purpose and ministry of the Holy Spirit whose task is to glorify Christ not to draw attention to ourselves. Someone once said in this context "no man can give at the same time the impression that he has a great Saviour and that he is a great preacher". Worldliness, basically then, is the self-centred and self-pleasing pattern of life. How alien to the teaching of Jesus Christ "If any man will come after me let him say no to self, take up his cross daily and follow me".

The Discernment the Christian will Require. Then secondly there is the thought concerning the world in scripture which centres on:-

B. THE DEFILEMENT THE CHRISTIAN MUST AVOID

John states here "All that is in the world is not of the Father". It has no place at all in the mind of God and should therefore have no place at all in the lives of the children of God. What is it that John is thinking of here? I think, at the back of his thinking is a realisation

(a) The task of the Christian in the world Later on he will state this explicitly in 1 John 4:17 where he writes "As he is, so are we in this world". Words that are reminiscent of Christ's words in His resurrection appear recorded in John 20:21 where He says "as my Father hath sent me, so send I you". The Father sent the Son not simply to redeem the world but to reveal. Christ Himself said, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father". The Christian is here, before that means he is here not simply to proclaim the and purpose of God but he is also here to God. One of the most tremendous statements statement recorded in Galatians 2:20 "Christ lives in me then I should look like Him. That we find expressed again and again in the gospels. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" but He also said, "ye are the light of the world". Just as He shed light, the light of God's truth, of God's grace, of God's righteousness upon the world. This task is an optional extra for the few but is a total need of man so are we in the church. We are here both to proclaim the truth of God and to reveal the mind of God, the righteousness of God, the love of God. Paul writing to the Philippian Church, Philippians 2:15 speaks of the church at Philippi as those who are called to "shine as lights in the world". But closely linked with John's thought of the task of the Christian there is his thought of:-

(b) The threat to the Christian in the world and the threat is simply that the world will spoil the Christian's testimony and witness. How can a worldly Christian, whose life is cluttered up with ideas,

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pursuits and standards which have nothing at all in common with the mind of God the Father. How can such a Christian represent the Father? What sort of a picture does that kind of a Christian present to the world? The kind of Christian whose way of life, whose attitudes, whose standards, whose pursuits are identical with those who are unconverted. James speaks of the need of the Christian to keep himself "unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). Peter in II Peter 1:4 refers to the Christian as someone who has escaped from "the corruption that is in the world" and again in II Peter 2:20 as escaping "from the pollutions of the world". A worldly Christian is a negation of the Gospel, a contradiction of the truth of God, a parody of the way of life to which the Christian is called. It is just as if the son of the owner of a laundry went about in filthy clothes - he is not much of an advertisement for the laundry that his father owns. The Christian is a light and the light may be burning but what if the globe encasing the light is dirty?

The Discernment the Christian will Require: The Defilement the Christian must Avoid: and then the third thought centres on:-

C. THE DETACHMENT THE CHRISTIAN MUST MAINTAIN

"Love not the world nor the things that are in the world" (v.15) (v.17) "the world passeth away". There are two final comments that we must make on the danger that John sees in the world. The first is that John is aware of:-

(a) The environment in which the Christian will be found While the Christian is told not to "love the world" John is well aware of the fact that the Christian must live in the world. Christ had said in His prayer recorded in John 17 "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil". A Christian is not meant to be withdrawn out of the world, i.e. he is not to be removed from physical contact with people who are ungodly and unconverted but if he is in physical contact with them basically he has very little in common with them or their way of life. He is in the world but he is not of the world even "as Christ was not of the world" (John 17:14). He is in the world for the purposes of God. The world is the environment in which the Christian will be found for it is there that he will exercise the responsibility that God has laid upon him. This doesn't mean necessarily that the Christian will go everywhere where the unconverted people go but it also means that he will not be withdrawn from them into a kind of monastic clique, a kind of Christian ghetto, having no contact at all with those who are unconverted. On the occasion of the recent visit by Cliff Richard I received a phone call from a father whose daughter - a keen Christian - was very disappointed that she had not been able to get a ticket to come to the rally. I pointed out that we were concerned that the rally should be an opportunity for Christians to invite unconverted people to hear Cliff Richard's testimony, and I asked if the ticket was for the girl herself or for her and some unconverted friends. I got the reply that it was for herself and for some of her friends and the father added the further comment that she didn't have any friends who were not Christians. Now that may be all right for a very young girl but certainly it is not all right for a Christian who is mature and grown up and responsible. We are meant to achieve the miracle that Christ achieved of being in the world but not of it, of rubbing shoulders with people who are totally different from us in their whole outlook on life, but at the same time remaining different from them. The environment in which the Christian will be found is the world, that physical environment in which unconverted people live and move and have their being. But if that is the environment in which the Christian will be found, John also has in mind:-

(b) The enslavement from which the Christian must be free "Love not the world". Never allow the world to capture your loyalty or your love, never allow the values that are purely worldly values, i.e. the product of unconverted people and their way of thinking - never allow these values to shape your life. "Love not the world".

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There is nothing so dominating as love, nothing so compelling, so constraining, so controlling. Any girl into whose heart love has come will realise how this love dominates every moment of the day. The ways of the world can be made attractive. The prince of the world will see to that. In the very first temptation, the fruit of the forbidden tree is described as appearing "pleasant to the eyes, a thing to be desired" but how deceptive. Nothing that the world can offer will last; either in this life or in that to come - "the world passeth away" and Paul adds his comment in I Corinthians 7:31 "the fashion of this world passeth away". There is nothing durable about anything that is the product of the unconverted man. The world then is something from which the Christian must be different. Inwardly, in his attitude and therefore outwardly in his actions. It is this very difference that the world resents, and the world will try to force the Christian to conform. In so many ways we become conscious of this. I remember Professor Blacklock, Professor of Classics in Auckland University, commenting on the strange fact that a person can refuse to drink any beverage without evoking any comment except if he refuses to drink alcohol. He can refuse to drink tea, or coffee, or milk, or water, or lemonade, or coca-cola and no comment is made, no eyebrows raised, but if he refuses to drink that the world has decided is a must for social acceptance, if he refuses to drink alcohol then the world immediately will turn the pressure on him and subtly will try to make him conform. But the word of God says, "Be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Why are we not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds? Simply so that we may then prove what is "that good and acceptable and perfect will of God". If we allow the will of man to dominate us we will never experience that into which the will of God will lead us. The worldling hates to be shown up for what he is. No wonder Christ said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). I believe it is just because the Christian refuses to be "gutless" and shows up how "gutless" the worldling is that the Christian is resented and disliked. And so our Lord says, recorded in John 15:18 and 19, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you". Here then is the enslavement from which the Christian must be free: freed from the domination of man. In the book of Proverbs we are told "The fear of man bringeth a snare". The Christian is free from the slavery of social opinion in order that he can be free for a doing of the will of God and that service to which he is called in the will of God, to that way of life into which the will of God will bring him.

No wonder the world then constitutes a danger concerning which the Christian must ever be on his alert and against which he must ever be on his guard.

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FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD

Passage studied I John 2:18-29

8th December, 1971

THE LIGHT IN WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BATHED

"THE DANGERS REVEALED BY THE LIGHT - 2 ERROR"

In our last study covering verses 15-17, the first peril or danger revealed by the light in the mind of John was "the world". He was concerned with the area of behaviour in Christian conduct. The second danger has to do with the area of Christian belief. By way of introduction and in passing we may note that there is a stupid mentality that underrates belief, the mentality that thinks it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere; whereas the truth of the matter is that the more sincere you are the more important it is that what you believe is true. Of the mentality that says it doesn't matter what you believe but how you behave - an attitude of mind which forgets that what you believe dictates and decides how you behave. For example, if we all in this church at the present moment believed that the church was on fire we would behave quite differently from the way in which we are behaving. We are sitting still in the pews because we believe the church is not on fire. This passage is, however, not without its difficulties but the main thrust of what John has to say is clear. They could see three factors in the situation that John is seeking to pinpoint:

A. THE CORRUPTION: THE CHRISTIAN HAS TO EVADE

There were forces at work that were out to damage the life of the church and their attack was centred upon the belief of the Christian and we read of their existence and intention in v.26 of this passage where John writes "These things have I written concerning them that would seduce you". We want to note two things about these people who bring these pressures to bear upon the thinking and the believing of the Christian Church. We note first of all:-

- (a) How they are described They are described in v.18 as "anti-christ" v. 18 reads "it is the last time: and ye have heard that anti-christ will come, even now there are many anti-christs; whereby we know that it is the last time". There are two points here that call for elucidation. The first is what does John mean by the phrase "the last time" or the last hour? Does he use this phrase to describe the whole Christian dispensation or era? or is he making a mistake in thinking that he is in the last hour before the actual coming again of Christ? or, is the phrase which in the Greek is not the but a last hour used to describe the situation which was existing then and which would exist in an even more intensified degree immediately before Christ's second coming? This last seems to be a very real and possible interpretation of what John has to say. The second point which calls for elucidation is the word "anti-christ" and later, in its plural form "anti-christs". Most commentators identify this use of the word "anti-christ" with the reference by Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians 2:3 following, where he begins "that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition:" and again in v.8 he refers to "that Wicked One". It is generally agreed that there is an anticipation in the minds of the early Christians that the second coming of Christ would be preceded by the heading up of the opposition to Christ in one person. But that does not mean to say we may not see many earlier manifestations of that same power in other ways and at other times... Who that anti-christ will be we cannot say. Some have thought that it might well be the Roman Church - from within the Roman Church: others would say within the ranks of the Communists.

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but in the meantime we can note two things: first of all, the lie they proclaim! They deny the deity of Christ (v.22) and this is what makes it difficult to interpret anti-christ as being the Church of Rome. Secondly - the loss they inflict (v.23) where John points out that in rejecting the truth of the Incarnation they destroy at one blow the knowledge of the mercy and grace of God the Father, which we only have in and through Jesus Christ. This is how they are described then, and of course there were those active in the life of the church in Ephesus, in St. John's own time, who denied the deity of Christ. They were anti-christs, false christs, opposers of Christ. What a label to wear. Then we note secondly:-

(b) How they are disowned In v.19 we read "They went out from us, but they were not of us". John Stott points out in his commentary that this verse throws light upon two doctrines. The first doctrine is that of the church. Obviously these people had been in among the Christians but apparently they were not Christians, thus substantiating the distinction that many make between what is called "the visible Church" and what is also called "the invisible Church" i.e. there are those who merely belong to a denomination or a congregation and there are those who may do that but also belong to Christ. The second doctrine is the doctrine which is called that of the perseverance of the saints. Our Lord said "he that shall endure to the end shall be saved" and John Stott adds this comment "not because salvation is the reward of endurance but because endurance is the hall-mark of salvation". These people to whom John, the apostle, is referring went out of their own accord, their departure was in effect a disclosure. They could not stay in the fellowship because they were not of it. Does all this not throw some light on the actions of those who are drawn to the fellowship of the Christian Church and for a while participate in its life but who after a short time withdraw? They find that they have nothing really in common with the Christians and their departure is a disclosure of their real spiritual condition and state. How often we find that there are those who fall into this category. They come, they enjoy, and then they depart. This may be also the reason why when an evangelical minister who is true to the Word of God comes to a church and preaches the Word with grace and truth there are those who leave the congregation. Up until that moment they had been at ease in the life of the church but now that the truth of God is proclaimed they find they have nothing in common with the truth and so they withdraw.

The corruption to evade in our thinking and in our believing. But John also has something to say about the way in which that corruption can be counteracted, and so he speaks of:-

B. THE COMMUNION THE CHRISTIAN SHOULD ENJOY

He refers to this in v.20 and again in v.27 where he speaks of an "anointing" that the Christians have all received. "But you have an unction (an anointing) from the Holy One, and ye know all things" or as the R.S.V. translate it "you all know" with the further and fuller translation in the N.E.B. "you all have knowledge". And that anointing is of course the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and it is the presence and power and ministry of the Holy Spirit that is the safeguard against error in doctrine. So in thinking of how this corruption can be counteracted John stresses:-

(a) The anointing they have received It is recorded of our Lord that He was anointed with the Holy Ghost (Acts 10:38) and it is generally agreed by commentators and scholars that the reference here is to the Holy Spirit, and particularly to the ministry of the Holy Spirit who our Lord said would "when he is come will guide you into all truth". In Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church (I Corinthians 2:9 and 10) he speaks again of this ministry of the Holy Spirit, and you remember he begins by pointing out how "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit". There is a ministry of enlightenment and insight that the Holy Spirit exercises in the life of every believer, and the stress in John's words here in v.20 is on the word

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all - ye all have knowledge. These people who were attacking the faith of the Christians claimed to have special knowledge. They maybe made out that they were more intelligent than the Christians who believed this about Christ. But John points out that they all have knowledge, that spiritual knowledge and insight are not the prerogative of a privileged few but the right and the experience of every Christian. There is of course obviously a place for teachers: Paul makes this abundantly clear in I Corinthians 12 where teaching is listed among the gifts of the Spirit; but the ministry of the Spirit in teaching is something every Christian ought to know and experience. And so, in v.21 John makes the point that they do already know "I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth". It is a simple fact that some of the most deeply taught Christians are found not in the pulpits but in the pews of our churches. It is worth noting that John points out in v.27 that the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the coming of the Spirit into our lives, His indwelling is a permanent experience "the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you". In this connection it is important that we should differentiate between the gifts of the Spirit and the ministries of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit are special and identifiable gifts that Holy Spirit - we are told in I Corinthians 12 - "gives to each man severally as he will". Whether or not I have a certain gift of the Spirit has nothing whatever to do with me; it has everything to do with the sovereignty of the Spirit. This is why those dear folk who lay great stress on the gift of speaking in tongues are completely unbiblical and unscriptural in the emphasis they put upon it. The gift of tongues is listed among the gifts of the Spirit. It does exist, but it is for the Holy Spirit to say whether or not he will give it and whether or not he will withdraw it. The ministries of the Holy Spirit are those functions of the Holy Spirit which he is to exercise in the life of every Christian. Our Lord did not indicate that in the coming of the Spirit of truth some would be taught and some would not, but He implied that everyone would experience the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. And so, John reminds the Christians that spiritual knowledge and insight and understanding depend not upon man's intelligence but upon man's submission to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life, and all my life long and all my life through the Holy Spirit will want to take of the things of Christ and show them to me. The anointing they had received. But he also speaks here of -

(b) The abiding they must secure In v.24 he writes "Let that therefore abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you ye shall also continue in the Son, and in the Father". What they had heard was of course the Word of the Gospel, and here we get another part of the safeguard, of that corrective that the Christian can have against error. Here we have the Spirit of God linked to the Word of God. The written word - yes, of course, and supremely - but also the living Word. John is afraid that some Christians might be taught to despise the simplicity of the gospel but he holds on to it and urges them to hold on to it. The fact that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. There is a danger sometimes in the lives of some Christians as they progress in the realm of education and understanding and knowledge that they are tempted to despise the Gospel. In that there is no flattery, no regard or respect paid either to man's achievements or to man's intelligence. The Gospel was God inspired, God designed, and God carried through, and there is sometimes a danger for men to move away from the simplicity of that. John urges them to let the Gospel remain in them, that Gospel which they heard from the beginning "hold fast to that" he says. It was the Holy Spirit who led you to see your need of Christ and Christ as the answer to the need - hold on to it. Don't let it go. And so he envisages the counter-acting influence of the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the Christian holding steadfastly to the Gospel.

He has one more thought in mind in this section. We have thought of the corruption the Christian must evade. We have thought of the communion the Christian should enjoy. Finally we come to:-

C. THE CONCLUSION THE CHRISTIAN WILL EXPECT

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We come to the closing two verses of this chapter, verses 28 and 29 which some commentators think ought to be linked with the passage that follows, or maybe regarded as a bridge from the one line of thought to the other. We shall, however, include them in our study tonight because the light in which the fellowship is bathed is a light which includes this great hope to which reference has already been made in this section, that Christ is coming again. And so John speaks of:-

(a) The coming which should delight the child of God. v.28 "And now little children abide in him, that when he shall appear we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming." A Christian, whose belief and whose behaviour have been maintained in such a way as to be pleasing to God, will look forward to the second coming of Christ with a great longing and a great desire: that coming will bring with it the opportunity to pour out into the ears of God, the Father all that life has held. It is interesting that in this context John once again uses that term of affection "little children". It carries with it the undertone not only of his own fatherly love and affection for them but also of the Fatherhood of God. This is the forgotten doctrine amongst evangelical Christians. We have stressed, and rightly so, the Saviourhood of Christ; we have stressed, and rightly so, the ministry of the Holy Spirit; but in the lives of many, many evangelical Christians we have forgotten the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God. Here John uses the word translated "confidence" a word which carries with it the sense of freedom, openness, frankness, liberty. The liberty of children chattering in the presence of a Father, and this of course is the basic relationship into which Christ has led us. How soever, how grim we sometimes make it all. Here John envisages the Christian at the end of the road being able to talk freely, happily, and with complete frankness about everything that life has held. Dr. Adolf Sapphire, the great Hebrew Christian, once sought to define what it meant to him and what it should mean to us to live the Christian life. He put it in one unforgettable phrase "Get into the presence of God and then do whatever you like". The vision there is of a child, happy and free, rejoicing in the fact that the Father is watching, and yet glad in the liberty that that love creates. The coming which should delight the child of God, and:-

(b) The conduct which should befit the child of God. John speaks of the possibility of being shamed away from Him at His coming, and then goes on to speak of the necessity of doing righteousness if we are truly born of the Spirit. If we are a child of a parent then we should exhibit something of the parent's character whose nature we share. If we fail to do this then we shall indeed be shamed away from his presence: just like a child who has been misbehaving during the absence of the parents would be ashamed to come into their presence upon their return. How tragic if that be so. You and I are meant to live every day in a way that is worthy of the name that we bear lest we are shamed away from His presence at His coming.

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FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD

Passage studied I John 3:1-18

12th January, 1972.

Part 2 THE LOVE WITH WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BOUND OR BLESSED

After the introduction in the first part of our Bible Studies in this Epistle we took as our overall title "THE LIGHT IN WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BATHED". We now move into the second part where we take as our overall title "THE LOVE WITH WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BOUND". Our section for study begins and ends with a reference to love: the first one - in v.1 - we read of the love given and the other in v.18 of the love shown. Dr. Plummer comments that the word "love" occurs in this Epistle, and particularly in this section of it - chapters 3 and 4 - sixteen times as a noun, twenty-five times as a verb and five times as a verbal adjective. We take as the title for our study this week:

"LOVE - THE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD"

Families very often have distinctive characteristics: and when we see a child we very often say "Well, he is a" and then we name the family. Sometimes it is the colouring of the hair or eyes; the set of the head or the shape of it; the kind of voice; something identifies the possessor of it right away as belonging to a certain family. Here is the outstanding quality by which a child of God can be recognised - their love. Not love in an emotional sense but in an evaluational sense. That is to say that in the life of a Christian there is a recognition of the worth of God and of the worth of other individuals - a caring concern for others that is the mark of the children of God. And in this section John is concerned with three aspects of this family characteristic. We note:-

A. THE CONCERN THAT CHRISTIAN LOVE PORTRAYS

John has two things to say about this love:

(a) It has been received personally In v.1 we read "See what love the Father has given us in order that we should be called children of God, and so we are". If God the Father is love, then if the children are to be like the Father there must be a similar love in them. This is a truth that I have stressed again and again in my ministry here that with the new life of the Spirit there comes the new love of the Spirit. In the Pauline verses that confirm this truth, Romans 5:5 where we read "the love of God (i.e. God's love) has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" and again in II Corinthians 5:14 where we read "the love of Christ constraineth us" and again in Galatians 5:22 "the fruit of the Spirit is love". And here in this verse the R.S.V. translates the Greek more accurately: in the A.V. we read "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us" in the N.E.B. it is translated "has shown", the R.S.V. translates "has given" and that is exactly what the Greek means. It is not that God is showing us something or bestowing something upon us in a general sense but that He is giving something to us, namely His own love. Love, not in the sense of being fond of but love in the sense of recognising the worth of. This transforming love brings with it a transformed sense of values, things and people are viewed from a new standpoint and what seemed to be worthless is now seen to be beyond price; what seemed unimportant is now seen to be vital. John sees in this not only an experience of which the Christian is aware but also an evidence by which the Christian is assured. Note what he writes in John 14 "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love". This is a most significant verse. This assurance of salvation is ours when we realise that our values are changing,

the Word of God, the House of God, the people of God, the day of God, all these things are now valued by us whereas previously we found them boring and dull. We know because we love. This love which has been received personally John also says:

(b) It will be revealed practically Love is practical. Love is never content to remain inactive; love longs to act, to serve, to minister, to do. When a mother loves her children, as most mothers do, her love expresses itself in the ceaseless activity of heart and hand. She is always thinking over what needs to be done and how it can best be done, and then toils gladly at the doing of it. So this section ends as it has begun with a reference in the same breath to our being children and our being loving - not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. John reminds his readers of the example that Christians have in v.16 where he reminds them of the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." V.16 speaks of sacrifice being of the very nature of love; in fact love almost demands that its serving, that its caring be sacrificial. To fail to care for other Christians, to fail to realise that each other Christian matters is to parody the love of God and to deny our very nature as children of God. Sacrifice may be in terms of time, it may be in terms of money. How many parents have known what it is to go without so that their children may not be deprived! It may be in terms of strength. We are told here that we are to lay down our lives, making ourselves available sacrificially, at great inconvenience to minister as occasion arises to the needs of others. Not to their wishes but to their needs. We have many who are prepared to tell us what they want but what they want does not necessarily correspond to what they need.

The concern of Christian love portrayed. And then John has something to say about:-

B. THE CONDUCT THAT CHRISTIAN LOVE PURSUES

Love determines both our attitudes and our actions. Love will not only affect our own lives, it will affect those we love and those with whom we live. And John has two things to say here: first of all:

(a) How holy the child of God will be In v.3 we read of the Christian "purifying himself, even as he is pure". In v.6 "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not" in v.9 "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin..... cannot sin". At first sight all this seems very extreme if not absurd and even impossible. It also seems to contradict what John has said earlier in chapter 1 and the opening verses of chapter 2 when he speaks quite specifically of the possibility of a Christian sinning. John of course, is not contradicting himself, he would not be so stupid. It is important for us to note that in these references in the passage we are studying John is using the present tense. Professor William Barclay translates "He cannot be a consistent and deliberate sinner" A Christian is someone who cannot and does not go on and on continually persisting in and enjoying to the full a life of disobedience and rebellion against God. And two reasons are given by John: first of all the nature the Christian possesses is not a nature that enjoys sinning. Note what he writes in v.9 where he uses the words "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." There are three possible ways of understanding that phrase "his seed remaineth in him". The word 'his seed' may refer to the children of God, in which case "in him" should be spelt with a capital H. Christians do not go on sinning because they abide in Him, in God. But more likely the seed will refer to the nature of God, implanted in the life of the believer. The kind of reference which would support this is found in II Peter 1:4 where Peter says that we are "partakers of the divine nature". It is not the nature of God to sin and therefore it is not the nature of the child of God to sin. Others would take the phrase "the seed" as referring to the Word of God and they would turn to verses like I Peter 1:23 where we read "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever". But I think the second interpretation seems to make the best

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sense, i.e. it is not the nature of the saint to go on sinning and enjoying it. We take the analogy of a pig and a sheep: both have distinct natures. If a pig and a sheep both fall into a muddy hole the pig would wallow in it and enjoy it; the sheep would struggle and want to get out. If a Christian does sin it is against his nature and he never enjoys it, and he is not content until he gets out of it. The other reason for the holiness of life to be found in the child of God lies not only in the nature the Christian possesses but in the future the Christian foresees. So in vv. 2 and 3 John refers to the fact that although we are the children of God, although the family likeness is there, we shall never be perfect until we see Christ either by our being called into His presence or by His coming again to this earth of ours. This confrontation with Christ is something that affects what we are, where we go and what we do. So, in v.3 John affirms that "every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

How holy the child of God will be, and:

(b) How hated the child of God will be There are two references in this section to "the world". In v.1 we read "the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not". In vv. 12 and 13 Cain is referred to as typical of the world which sets aside the truth of God in preference for its own ideas and standards and which resents to the point of hate those who do not toe its line. The reason for this resentment on the part of the world lies in the condemnation of the world that the Christian is passing on the world quite unwittingly. Cain's own works were evil. But no hatred, no resentment, no criticism, no ostracism will make the Christian turn aside from the will of God. "The world knoweth us not" How it can hurt when people just don't want to know you because you are a Christian. All this is simply a working out in practical experience what our Lord already had spoken about in John 15 v.18 following: chapter 17 v.14 following. The Christian may be feared, but loved - never - not by the world; and the world is that area of life from which the truth and mind of God are deliberately excluded and with which they are utterly incompatible.

The concern that Christian love portrays: the conduct Christian love pursues: and finally:

C. THE CONTRAST THAT CHRISTIAN LOVE PROVIDES

All that we have noted so far suggests that the Christian life motivated by the love of God will be arrestingly different. And John probes behind the outward and obvious difference to the inward and unseen difference. The contrast is vivid. In the world John sees:

(a) The life that rejects the law of God In v.4 we are told that "sin is the transgression of the law" and the law is of course God's law. We find a strange attitude to the Ten Commandments even among Christians so-called. As if the Ten Commandments have been scrapped. But Jesus said, Matthew 5:17 "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am come not to destroy but to fulfil." i.e. to fill with fuller and deeper meaning. Paul says that the goal, the end of God's purposes being worked out for us in Christ are to be interpreted in terms of the fulfilment of the law, Romans 8:4 "In order that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." In Romans 13:10 he says that love is "the fulfilling of the law." The Ten Commandments still stand. "Honour thy father and thy mother" "Thou shalt not steal" These are all obligatory still upon the Christian. Sin is the breaking of God's law. Who are these people? Why do they do it? V.8 we are told "He that committeth (goes on committing) sin - rebelling against God - is of the devil." In v.10 John speaks of those who are "the children of the devil." If people break, consistently, continually and deliberately, the laws of God then they are children of the devil. The power that is dominating their lives is evil, however respectable it may seem outwardly. In contrast to these people whose lives reject the law of God John speaks of others in whose lives can be seen:

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(b) The love that respects the law of God Love for a person means loving and caring for the things that that person loves and cares for. This is part of the insight of love for which Paul prayed in his Philippian letter where he asks "that their love might abound yet more and more in knowledge and in wise insight." What was and is the purpose of Jesus Christ? We are told in v.5 "ye know he was manifested to take away our sins" v.8 "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." This very rebellion against the laws of God has its origin in the heart of Satan. Its outcome means the impoverishment of the lives of men. Christ came to release men from that bondage; to enrich their lives; to turn their hearts towards the law of God. Whether that attitude is one of pure selfishness or one of deliberate sinfulness, both come from the pit and both are out as far as the children of God are concerned. They are to have no place in our lives because they have no place in His plan. We love Him and that means we love what He loves, and our one desire is to find out what will please Him and then to go and do it.

In what sharp contrast then the Christian life stands, marked and motivated by that love that respects the law of God, as against the life that rejects the law of God.

So here we have: LOVE - THE FAMILY CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD.

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FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD

Passage studied I John 3:19-4:6

26th January, 1972

In our previous study we entered the second part of the Epistle to which we gave the overall title "THE LOVE WITH WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BOUND OR BLESSED" and in our last study covering the first eighteen verses of chapter 3 we took as our title "LOVE - THE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD". In this passage we take as our title:

"LOVE - THE CONFIDENCE OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD"

There are two strands of thought running through this section: the first dealing with the confidence we have and the second the knowledge that we have.

When you stop to think of it confidence or assurance is always a mark or quality about love. With what confidence will a child approach its father while a stranger might approach the same person with diffidence and hesitation. Again with what confidence based upon intimate knowledge will a child make its way about the mansion house in which it may live where a stranger would be lost and would be stumbling in the dark. And so I believe that it is true to say that love has this kind of confidence in the child of God.

Our study this week falls then into two sections: first of all -

A. LOVE'S CONFIDENCE BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD

Chapter 3:19-24. We base our title for this section upon the phrase found in v.21 "then have we confidence toward God". I was interested to note, after I had titled this section as I have, that J.B. Phillips titles this paragraph "Living in love means confidence in God". I think we could say a great deal more exactly not so much that living in love means confidence in God as confidence towards God. The word translated "confidence" in the Greek is a word which carries with it the sense of openness and frankness of making one's way readily and confidently into the presence of God and feeling that we can tell Him everything and share everything with him. I want us to note two things. First of all that John speaks of:-

(a) The conditions that must first be fulfilled. We look to the end of this section to see what is in the mind of John the basis upon which this confidence rests, and the key to it all lies in what we call "the obedience of faith" through which initially the right relationship has been established and because of which that right relationship can then be enjoyed. All that is said in the opening verses 19-22a is said because of what follows because "we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments (i.e. faith in Christ and love to man) dwelleth in him and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us by the Spirit which he hath given us." What are the conditions then that must first have been fulfilled? There are two: first that a choice must have been made - the choice which places its faith, its trust, its confidence, its reliance, its dependence in the person of Jesus Christ; that obedience or faith which is really what lies at the very heart of our conversion experience. It is this that constitutes a person a Christian, putting our faith in Him who is God's Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. But tied in with that choice that must have been made is change that will have been manifest - the change in attitudes not only towards God but towards everything and everyone, that change which can best be described as "a new love" a new evaluation which constitutes the

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evidence of the new life within. All this is tied up in what John is driving at in v.23 of this section. Until that condition of saving faith has been fulfilled there can be no confidence towards God, or if there is it will be a false confidence. But for those who have made this choice and in whose lives this change is being manifest John would have this to say that the condition, the basic condition, the initial condition which leads to this confidence before the throne of God has been fulfilled. But if John deals here first of all with the conditions that must first be fulfilled, he goes on to speak here of:-

(b) The communion that should then be enjoyed And that communion is summed up here with the words "then have we confidence toward God" The openness, the frankness, the readiness of access, the assurance of a welcome which is characteristic of a child running forward where a stranger would hold back. I often feel the need among evangelical Christians is to recapture the truth of the Fatherhood of God which was so precious to the mind of Christ and so prominent in His teaching. "When ye pray" said Jesus Christ say "our Father". And again he gave this tremendous assurance to those who were worried and troubled saying "your Father knoweth" and when He wanted to assure us that our God was a prayer hearing and a prayer answering God He put that assurance on the basis of the Fatherhood of God "If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more shall your heavenly Father" Jesus tried to drive this tremendous truth home that we have a loving heavenly Father but evangelical Christians have almost forgotten it or if they haven't forgotten it they have forsaken it for other doctrines, but surely no doctrine is so meaningful as this. This freedom of access, this liberty of a child in the presence of the Father, this communion that should then be enjoyed. John writes of two facets of this communion: he notes how it can be clouded in v.21 he speaks of how our hearts can condemn us and also in v.20. In v.19 he speaks of the need arising of assuring our hearts before God, of those times in our lives when that confidence can be lost and instead of this openness and this confidence towards God a sense of condemnation arising from within our hearts out of a knowledge of our sin and rebellion results in a loss of confidence, the clouding of our communion, and the need then arises to persuade our hearts sometimes with difficulty, that we can and we dare and we will look still into the face of our loving God and Father. How familiar are with this experience in the relationships within an ordinary family when as children we would be uneasy and unhappy in the presence of our parents even if sometimes they themselves have been totally ignorant of the cause of it. But that clouding of our communion with God must not be allowed to remain, and so John writes of how it can be cleared In v.20 he writes "if our heart condemn us God knows everything. If our greater than our heart and knoweth all things" God knows about the battle before we yielded to that temptation, at the bitter regret that followed our failure, about the longing for fellowship, about the fountain open for sin and all uncleanness. You remember the words of Simon Peter, when he was being restored to the place of usefulness in the service of his Lord, by the Sea of Galilee when the Lord was asking him "lovest thou Me?" Do you remember how when the question was put for the third time Simon Peter broke out speaking passionately "Lord, Thou knowest all things, I knowest that I love Thee" He was throwing himself utterly and absolutely upon the knowledge of His Lord; the knowledge of God is so much greater than the knowledge of men. Men judge us just by what they see or hear; God judges by what He knows not only about the past but about the future, about the lessons learned, about the sins which that will have been deepened, about the pride that has been broken, about the lives that are still to be won. God knows all things. One of the tragic facts about Christian experience is that so often when failure comes to a Christian and his heart condemns him he then banishes himself from the presence of God, he stays away from the Church instead of coming humbly and brokenly if need be into its fellowship and coming confidently, asking and receiving not simply forgiveness but restoring grace. This is the kind of confidence that the child of God has, the Christian has, a

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confidence that meets the test even of failure and sin! The kind of analogy that, it would seem to me, might well occur to our minds is that of a girl who falls into sin and becomes pregnant, outwith the marriage bond. Surely the supreme test of her love for her parents and their love for her will then come. What will she do? Will she leave them or will she go to them? Heart-broken she may be but sure that here at least there will be understanding and there will be hope. One of the tragedies is that so often we judge God's forgiveness by man's forgiveness, and sometimes evangelical Christians are the most unforgiving people on earth, they have a message of forgiveness for the sins of the unconverted but not for the sins of the converted.

Here we have this picture of love's confidence before the Throne of God. And then we move on into the second section where John is dealing with:-

B. LOVE'S CONFIDENCE ABOUT THE TRUTH OF GOD

Chapter 4:1-6. In these verses the mind of John has moved on to another aspect of this confidence of love which has its roots in that insight and knowledge which enables a deepening knowledge to move steadily and confidently among the confused mass of ideas and beliefs which the minds of men continually produce, moving with an insight and sensitivity which enables love to differentiate between truth and error. Love can walk confidently through the maze of man's thoughts and man's ideas, discerning what is of God and what is not. And so John writes in v.2 "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God" and ends this section in v.6 "Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." There is a confident knowledge based upon love's sensitivity and insight. There are two things that we need to notice. First of all:

(a) The distortion of the truth that love will meet Chapter 4:1 "believe not every spirit, but try (or prove) the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." Again in v.5 John writes of them "They are of the world: and the world heareth them." And in v.4 John refers to Satan as being the inspirer of error; and in v.6 we are told that these people don't want to listen to the truth as it was proclaimed by John. This indicates he says that they are not of God. What a picture we have here, both of the teachers of error and the listeners to it. It has been said that in war the first casualty is always truth and that is certainly true in political warfare between nations. But we are involved in spiritual warfare and the Devil glories in half-truths as well as in downright lying. He can quote the Bible or misquote it, better than any Christian can. Teachers of error, though they may not realise it, are doing the Devil's work, they are "of the world" of which the Devil is the prince, and those people who are "of the world" and not "of God" are prepared to listen and even enjoy listening to them and in contrast such hearers don't want to listen to the truth as it is in Christ. What a word of warning this is, as much needed today as it was needed then. There is a distortion of truth that love will meet. But then John also speaks of:-

(b) The discernment of the truth that love will need "And at the heart of all the claims and counter claims we find this test to be applied. The test "What think ye of Christ?" Note the words in v.2 "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh is of God: every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh is not of God." We need to remember that everything that is religious is not therefore necessarily divine or Christian. It could be devilish. Everything bearing the name of Christ is not necessarily Christian, it could be satanic. Wherever you get anything of value you get a counterfeit immediately produced, and in the realm of spiritual truth it is just the same. The acid test of those who are true Christians as distinct from the false is what do they severally believe about Jesus Christ. Do they believe what the Bible records about Him? that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" This is

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the test, and has been claimed that again and again this test has been applied by Christians who have met claims made by spiritualists that what they are doing is not opposed to the Christian faith and the test has worked. What is possibly even more searching is that the distinction which divides the teachers also divides the hearers, that people are very often giving themselves away by their reaction to the truth. If they resent it and if they refuse to listen, if they reject it John says it is because they are not of God, their spiritual or rather their religious life is not derived from God it is derived from the world. It is purely human: it is even worse than human, its inspiration is satanic. So preaching that is popular is not necessarily Biblical preaching.

It is in all this area which calls for this discernment that Christian love will move confidently, picking its way carefully, holding to the truth and avoiding error. Love, we are told, is blind but love is in fact the very reverse of blind because if we love a person then we know. We know what is in keeping with the true character of the person: we know what will be acceptable and pleasing to the person; we know because we love and because we love we know. So it will be that the Christian will sense almost instinctively whether a point of view that is being expressed by somebody is truly of Christ or is of the world.

So the Christian lives confidently in these two areas of experience; there is:

THE CONFIDENCE OF LOVE BEFORE THE THRONE and there is
THE CONFIDENCE OF LOVE ABOUT THE TRUTH

I wonder whether you and I need to recapture something of this note of confidence, whether our lives need to be marked by it as we seek to live within the fellowship of the family of God and yet within the environment of a world which knows Him not.

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FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD

Passage studied I John 4:7-21

2nd February, 1972

Part 2 THE LOVE WITH WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BOUND OR BLESSED

So far in our studies in this second section of the Epistle we have noted LOVE AS THE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHILD OF GOD and LOVE AND THE CONFIDENCE OF THE CHILD OF GOD. In our study for this section we have chosen the title:-

"LOVE AND THE CHALLENGE TO THE CHILD OF GOD"

When we stop to think of it love always is a challenge. It is a tremendous challenge to be born into a family or adopted into a family. We are going to meet and become related to people that we have never met before and do not know and whose way of life can be startlingly different to our own. Think of what it would mean to a commoner to be married into the royal family, or for a Scots girl to be married into a French family - both of these would bring their own challenges to the one taking this step; and equally great is the challenge when a sinner of the world is born again into the family of God. We find we are faced with a new way of life sometimes with new standards of conduct. There is so much to be learned, such a different way of life to be lived. So this section opens with the words of John in v.7 "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." The challenge to the child of God. When we break down this amazing section of the Epistle which is possibly the richest of all we find that there are three lines of thought that seem to be interwoven in the thinking of the apostle. First of all we have:-

A. THE PORTRAYAL OF THE LOVE OF GOD

One of the emphases that we find in this section is the emphasis laid on the manifestation of the love of God in Jesus Christ. John is concerned to stress the fact that God is love (v.8 and v.16) and then to speak of the various facets of that love; and there are two that are stressed in these opening verses. First of all what I have called:-

(a) The manifesting of the love of God v.9 "The love of God was made manifest". Here John notes one of the qualities of love seen in the love of God, namely, that love is never content to remain unknown, that it is always seeking to express itself and to reveal itself to those it loves. We see this in terms of human love. The love of a child for a kitten will always want to express itself; the love of a boy for a girl, the love of a mother for her baby, the love of a husband for his wife. This is one of the characteristics of love, love is never content to remain unknown. It is always seeking to express itself in word, in deed. If this is true of human love, which is so imperfect, it must surely also be true of divine love. It is only when love is seen that we have assurance that it exists. Here we face, in my judgment, one of the strongest arguments for the incarnation. As I said in one of our earlier studies, human love demands the making of such a revelation and human life determines the manner of it. And so we are told, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" and through a human life and at that level God has manifested His love. This is true, historically, of the love of God and it will also therefore be true experimentally of that love experienced in our lives and expressed through them. As we see this portrayal of the divine love we are challenged by the fact that such a portrayal, such a manifestation of the caring concern of the love of God is called for from our own lives. The love of God was made manifest among us - historically

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but that love of God must still be made manifest among us - experimentally. It is still to be made manifest among men; and this is part of the challenge; we have to bear the family likeness. And if the life and love of God indwell us, and that love was a love that was not content to remain unknown, then that love must not remain unknown in and through our lives and testimony. The manifesting of the love of God - here is part of a challenge as we view historically the portrayal of the love of God. But the other thought that lies here centres round what I have called:-

(b) The ministering of the love of God The reality of the love of God was seen in the activity of the love of God, and here in these verses that thought is very much to the fore. In v.9 we are reminded that "God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him." In v.10 "Herein is love; not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." In v.14 "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." If it is true that love is never content to remain unknown it is also true that it is never content to remain inactive. Love must always be doing something. If this is recognised then we need to note also that along with the fact of love's activity is the intention and also the price of that activity - the intention behind it, and the price paid in the pursuit of it. And so in v.9 we are told that the intention of love was "that we might live through him". That is to say, the ministering of the love of God in Christ had this objective in order that we might live a fuller life, a freer life, a richer and a happier life, and the price to be paid if that was to be realised is mentioned in v.10 where John writes "God loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins". The price paid was paid on the Cross - the infinite worth of the Son of God that was the price. This portrayal of love is set out before us as something to be seen and appreciated in the very nature of God the Father, in His very Being and it is seen in His activity; and it is to be reproduced in us - the children of God. There must therefore be this similar ministering of love in every Christian with the same purpose and a willingness to pay the same kind of price of sacrificial service. This is part of the challenge of love to the child of God. The manifesting and ministering of God's love seen historically in Christ is to be seen experimentally and continually in and through the lives of those who are His born again children. This may seem daunting, indeed frightening, if not impossible and so we need to note the second point that John makes here. He speaks not only of

B. THE POSSESSION OF THE LOVE OF GOD

This would all be quite ridiculous were it not for one tremendous fact, and I have called that fact:-

(a) The transformation that has been made in the life of the child of God So fantastic is this transformation that Paul puts it in these unforgettable words "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." And here full cognizance is taken of the fact that the Christian has new resources of life and of love that the non-Christian does not have, and he never had before he became a Christian. And it is this transformation wrought because of the new resources that makes this challenge a challenge that can be met. So we read in v.12 "God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us". In v.13 "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us because he hath given unto us of his Spirit". In v.15 "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." v.16 "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." "GOD DWELLETH IN US" The God who is love dwells in us by His Spirit and therefore His love dwells in us. I wonder if you find this reciprocal phrase a little bit difficult to understand "we in him, and he in us". Some time ago I came across a comment which has certainly helped me to understand it. The speaker or writer used the illustration of an iron bar put into the fire and gradually you see that iron bar begin to glow with the heat. The bar is in the fire, and the fire is in the bar. So it is with

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us - we are in Him and He is in us, blended together in a unity and a union that transforms. God is not asking for the impossible; having come to live in our hearts, He has come to love in our hearts and through them. All that is said here is said in the light of the transformation that has been made in the life of the child of God. This leads on to the other thought of:-

(b) The obligation that must be met by the child of God v.11
 "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." We ought to love the way that God loved. This is the obligation that is laid upon us. We owe it to the Lord, to God Himself. He has made it possible, we ought therefore to make it actual. We bear His name, we are members of His family - born again of the Spirit of God therefore we owe it to the Father to behave in a way that is commendable to Him. We owe it to the world. God still loves the world, and now that Christ no longer walks the earth as He did long ago and thus the love of God was made manifest then - Christ however still walks the earth to-day in the lives of those in whom His Spirit has come to dwell and therefore that love must be made manifest through the lives of His own. We owe it to the world. The words and deeds of those in whom Christ has come to dwell by His Spirit, these will reveal the love of God in Christ just as the words and deeds of the Master did in the gospels and in those far off times, through us He seeks to manifest Himself to men still. To fail to do this is to fail to represent Him and to fulfil part at least of His intention for us and through us, where we live, where we work, where we worship. And of course we owe it to the church; we owe it to other Christians; that we should meet this obligation. This is one of the tremendous stresses of this Epistle that it is the love that Christians have one to another that is one of the great marks of the family of God. And of course this is part of the testimony and also part of the privilege and the thrill of being a Christian. This is an obligation; this is not an option. We simply must manifest the same love: we ought to love one another; to recognise their importance and their worth, letting other folk see that they matter and by word and deed ministering to their needs. The failure to do this will put a question mark against the validity of any profession we make that we are Christians. This is brought out most strongly towards the end of this section v.20 where John writes "If a man say, I love God, and hate his brother, he is a liar". The portrayal of the love of God: The possession of the love of God. In both of these we see part at least of the challenge of the love of God to the child of God. But all this is climaxed in the third thread of truth which is interwoven throughout this section: and John speaks finally of what I have called:-

G. THE PERFECTING OF THE LOVE OF GOD

John speaks of a maturity in love that has to be gained. In v.12 he speaks of "his love being perfected in us" in v.17 he writes "Herein is our love made perfect" in v.18 "perfect love casteth out fear, because fear has to do with punishment". The word used in the Greek and translated in English with the word "perfect" really means mature, fully grown, fully developed. There is then apparently to be a growth in love, not because the love of God in us is in any way lacking but because our understanding of it is not complete; because our acceptance of its implications isn't full; because our obedience to its prompting, because of our insights through it - all these need to be developed so that our love is made perfect, mature, fully developed. We recognise the inadequacy of what we call love in human relationships when we talk about a young boy going through what is called "calf love" baby love, immature love. The kind of love into which and out of which most boys fall many, many times. What has John to say along this line of the challenge of the perfecting of the love of God. He speaks first of all of:-

(a) The way in which love expands In v.12 we get the conditional clause "If we love one another, his love is perfected in us". Or in other words love grows by loving, by responding to the promptings of the love of God in us, by our obedience which will lead to a deepening experience of all that that love can mean to us and through us. This will lead to a growing confidence and a growing maturing love

will cast out fear. To begin with we may be afraid but as we go on obeying God and proving His faithfulness so our confidence is strengthened. We see this in human relationships: when the love of a good lad first comes to a girl, her response will be hesitating - even fearful until gradually as she responds step by step and discovers more and more the faithfulness and worthiness of the one who loves her, so her love will grow; it will mature in insight and experience, in strength and in courage. In other words love must have room in which to grow and that room is found in other lives, and in the will of God. Some people live in such small circles. They have a very small circle of a very few friends, whereas in a church like ours there are so many people to meet, so many people to get to know, so many lives to help or to be helped by. The analogy that always occurs to me is the analogy of a plant. I am sure that those of us who know even just a little about plants will know that sometimes a plant will be given to us, but it is a growing plant, it comes to us in a small pot and if we leave it in that small pot we find that it just cannot grow - not in the way it is meant to grow. We say that the plant has become 'pot bound' - there is not enough room in the pot for the roots, for sufficient soil from which it can draw nourishment and so it has to be taken out of the small pot and put into a much bigger one. There are some Christians whose concern and caring for others is literally 'pot bound'. The love of God in them and through them just hasn't got room in which to grow. They need to be shifted into a bigger pot. I wonder whether some of us are 'pot bound' whether the love of God in us is 'pot bound'. How many people do you know the name of in this congregation? Could you count them on the fingers of both your hands? And even if you can that's not very many out of a congregation and fellowship this size. "If we love one another" says John "God's love is perfected in us. Let's remember then that love needs room in which to grow and if love is denied that room, if love is frustrated, if love is fettered and cramped, then that love will surely suffer. The way in which love expands. This is possibly the most tremendous truth that we need to learn from this Epistle - love needs room in which to grow and that room, let us remember, is found either in the lives of others or in the will of God.

The final thought concerning this maturing of love, this perfecting of love, has to do not simply with the way in which love expands but with:-

(b) The Day for which love prepares This maturing of love is related in the thinking of John to the day of judgment. Note v.17 "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world." The day of judgment for the child of God is to be a day of evaluation and of assessment. It is not a day of judgment concerning sin - that day of judgment was on the Cross - but it is a day of judgment concerning love. John would seem to paint the picture we have been a maturing love, a developing love. Here that if our love has been busy at work: it is at home in then that day of judgment is the day that we will prepare for without fear. For love has been busy in the things of God: just as Christ was busy about the Father's business, so the child of God is happily busy about the Father's business. Motivated by the love of God, occupied with the work of God, in touch with so many in the church of God; as Christ was in the world so are we in this world. And so the child of God living that kind of life with a maturing and developing love awaits that day without fear. John says, with our love maturing, "we may have boldness in the day of judgment". That boldness is the word that suggests openness and frankness. There will be so much to tell, there will be so much to share, and this of course is the climax - rather like two children who have been left at home while the mother has gone out to do some shopping and they have been given tasks to do, and they have been busy. The mother said when she went away "When I come back I want to see how you have been getting on". The return, the promised return is awaited with excitement and eagerness. The children are just desperate for the mother to come back so that they can show her just

what they have been doing. Isn't this one of the great characteristics of love? Love longs to share with the one loved what it has been doing - not in any spirit of boastfulness but in a spirit of joy and happiness and gladness that the very success, maybe will be a pleasure and joy to the other.

Many years ago I came across a little bit of verse which has stuck in my mind ever since I first heard it. This is how it runs:-

"On, dare and suffer all things, 'tis but a stretch of road,
Then wondrous words of welcome, and then, the face of God."

THE PORTRAYAL OF THE LOVE OF GOD

THE POSSESSION OF THE LOVE OF GOD

THE PERFECTING OF THE LOVE OF GOD

No wonder we have titled this section - "THE CHALLENGE TO THE CHILD OF GOD"

THE LOVE WITH WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BOUND OR BLESSED so this second section ends. Who would want to exchange this kind of life and of love for anything in the world?

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ST. GEORGE'S-TRON PARISH CHURCH GLASGOW

Bible Studies - Winter Session 1971-72 - No. 13

Studies in I John by the Rev. George B. Duncan, M.A.

FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD

Passage studied I John 5:13-17

23rd February, 1972.

THE LIFE ON WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BASED

The final section of this Epistle contained in chapter 5 we have titled THE LIFE ON WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BASED following the two previous main sections THE LIGHT IN WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BATHED and THE LOVE WITH WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BOUND. In our first study in chapter 5 we titled the section vv. 1-12 THE ACCEPTANCE WE MUST MAKE OF THAT LIFE. This week we take chapter 5:13-17 and we title it:-

"THE ASSURANCE WE CAN HAVE OF THAT LIFE"

And first of all we want to note:-

THE DIRECTION IN WHICH FAITH WILL LOOK

This passage begins with one of the really great verses of the Epistles, a verse which coming at the close of the Epistle stands both in contrast to, and yet at the same time stands in a sense as complementary to, a similar verse at the end of the gospel. In the Gospel of John 20:31 we read "these are written that ye might believe and that believing ye might have life" - here John writes "These things have I written unto you that believe that ye may know". The gospel is concerned with the promotion of that faith which will lead to life; the epistle with that assurance which should be the sequel to faith. So salvation is the theme of the gospel; assurance is the theme of the epistle. And right away we face a distinction between salvation and assurance that is absolutely vital: they are not the same thing, and yet in our experience sometimes we confuse the one with the other. Many years ago my cousin, the Rev. James E. Duncan, now minister of Kinloch Rannoch Parish Church, wrote a tract for children that was called "Chorus 262". At that time there was only one chorus book, namely that produced by the Scripture Union or the C.S.S.M. as it was then known, and chorus 262 ran as follows "I am safe because I'm sheltered by Jesus precious blood, and I'm sure because He promised and He cannot break His word." Basing his tract on the story of the Exodus and the promise of God at the time of the Passover "When I see the blood I will pass over ye" the Rev. James Duncan pointed out that on that first Passover night there were really three kinds of people in Egypt. There were those who were sure but not safe - the blood was not there on the lintels of their doorposts but they were quite sure that they would come to no harm because they did not believe the Word of God that had come to them through Moses. Secondly, there were those who were safe but they were not sure - the blood was there all right but they were not prepared to trust the Word of God through Moses that if the blood was there then all would be well. And finally there were those who were safe and sure - the blood was there and they were sure that God would keep His word. Both of the last two groups of people were equally safe but the difference lay in the fact that in the one case they were sure and the other they were not sure. This may be a help to some folk who are saved, there is no question about it they are Christians but they are not sure about it, in all probability because they are not looking for their assurance in the right direction. And so we need to be reminded, and sometimes for our encouragement, that salvation and the assurance of salvation are two different things. So to our study, and I want just to note with you:-

A. THE BURDEN OF DOUBT FROM WHICH MY FAITH IS FREED

Uncertainty or doubt is never an easy thing to bear. Doubt presses down heavily on our spirits; uncertainty makes us unhappy. This could be doubt about the result of some examination, this can be a very disturbing and depressing time in our lives. It could be un-

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certainly about the love of a girl or a man - 'does she really love me?' 'Does he really love me?' - and that period of uncertainty is a time of misery. This applies also to uncertainty about our relationships to God and this is the most unsettling and depressing uncertainty of all. I want to make two comments concerning this burden of doubt from which my faith is freed. First of all:-

(a) The presumption of which faith can be accused. There are those who take the line that it is presumptuous for anyone to be sure. A great friend of mine from the island of Skye would never venture beyond "I'll be hoping so." if he was asked "Are you a Christian?" I would agree that it would be utterly presumptuous if I tried to find a basis for my assurance within myself alone; but if there were ample evidences in God's revelation of Himself in Christ that God means me to be sure, though the conditions of salvation are quite simple to understand and fulfil, that God's promises are absolutely clear, then surely it could be in a very real sense presumptuous for me to doubt the assurance of my salvation; for it really boils down to doubting God's Word. The assurance of which John is writing here has no hint of pride or presumption about it. John is not thinking in terms of conceit, of self-confidence, of self-righteousness. The assurance of which the Bible speaks has nothing in common with a presumptuous spirit. The presumption of which faith can be accused is not found here. But something else is found here, namely:-

(b) The intention by which faith can be assured. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (and the older manuscripts stop there in that verse) - in order that ye may know. That is to say, John wanted them to know, he wanted them to be sure, and all this is in keeping with the whole testimony of the New Testament. "I know whom I have believed" writes Paul. "We know we have passed from death unto life" writes John. Surely uncertainty is never something that love deliberately fosters: uncertainty is something that love would end.

And so we begin by noting THE BURDEN OF DOUBT FROM WHICH FAITH IS FREED: and then note secondly:-

B. THE BASIS OF TRUTH ON WHICH FAITH MUST REST

The words are addressed to those who "believe on the name of the Son of God" and that little word 'on' in the Greek has the sense of movement towards and into. My faith is something that reaches towards Jesus Christ and comes to rest in Him, just as the anchor of a ship descends to the ocean bed and then sinks into it. Those who believe "on the name of the Son of God" are those whose faith rests in the total worth of Jesus Christ - all that He is, all that He has done and will do, all that He has said and does say. The basis of my assurance then is not in me at all; it is in the Christ. There are two aspects of the Person of Christ which are related closely to the assurance that God means me to have concerning my salvation, and the first lies in:-

(a) What He did. supremely by that we mean what He did by His death on the Cross. In a mystery beyond all human understanding Christ, in His death, did something about the sin of the world which He alone could do; which we could never have done and which need never be done again. When I believe on the name of the Son of God, it means that I am leaning my whole weight upon the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. Is it presumptuous to believe in such a Saviour? One of the old-fashioned gospel hymns which has within its content some stresses about which I would not be too happy, nevertheless makes this tremendous statement - "My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought; My sin, not in part but the whole, is nailed to the Cross, so I hear it no more. Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Oh my soul." Faith in what others have done is an aspect of faith that is common to our daily life; in the ability, in the skill, in the reliability of the workmanship of another. Faith reaches out to, and rests on and in, the Son of

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God who died that I might be forgiven. That shout of victory 'It is finished' tells me that Christ knew He had finished the work of reconciliation: His being raised again from the dead by the Father assures me that the Father has set His seal upon the work of the Son. The work was perfectly done -- nothing that I can do can take away from it, nothing that I can do can add to it. It was a perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. My faith then rests in Christ, in what He did, and also in:-

(b) What He said That old chorus puts it in a nutshell 'I'm safe because I'm sheltered by Jesus precious blood, and I'm sure because He promised and He cannot break His word.' Time would fail to quote all the promises that Christ has made, the statements, the words that I can trust. 'Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out' Have I come? Then I have been received. 'If any man hear my voice and open the door I will come in' Have I heard His voice? Have I asked Him into my life? Then He has come because He said He would.

Faith in what He did: faith in what He said: faith in the work of Christ on my behalf: faith in the words of Christ to me in my need. Here is the basis of truth on which my faith will rest. THE BURDEN OF DOUBT FROM WHICH MY FAITH IS FREED leads on to the stress of THE BASIS OF TRUTH ON WHICH MY FAITH WILL REST and then finally John speaks of:-

C. THE BLESSINGS OF GRACE TO WHICH MY FAITH WILL LEAD

v. 14-17. The line of reasoning is quite simple. The final blessing, the final goal, lies in the area of a new relationship with God, and John writes of two aspects of it. First of all he stresses:-

(a) The access that is now open Again we have the use of this word 'confidence' or boldness that we have come across already three times in the epistle, speaking of liberty, of freedom to talk. What Dr. Griffith Thomas calls 'That absolute lack of reserve which characterizes true friendship' and we might add the words 'or love'. The knowledge, the facility, the readiness, to share everything, and to do that with our Father God who is also the Creator of the Universe but whom we have come to know as our Father through Jesus Christ. And the assurance we have in Christ makes this possible, makes it all real. This is the confidence - 'He heareth us'. Those three words are tremendous if we give them each their due weight. He - that is to say God: heareth - that is to say, He wants to hear, He waits to hear, He is willing to hear, He is ready to hear, He is there to hear: us - who are we? Sinners, insignificant little people, but through Christ we have been brought into this fantastic and unique relationship. Yes, the access is open. I am never tired of pointing out that the disagreement amongst Christians as to whether a cross or a crucifix is the true symbol of our faith pales into insignificance when we realise that the first symbol, given to us by God, of the significance of the Christian Gospel was the torn veil of the Temple; rent in twain from the top to the bottom - that approved symbol which tells us the access is open. And John goes on to stress that:

(b) The answers certain v.15 'If we know he heareth us, whatsoever we ask we know that we have the petitions that we desired.' The answer may be 'yes', it may be 'no', it could be 'wait', but an answer is certain. It will be 'yes' if it is in accordance with His will (v.14) it may mean 'wait' as well. How often the wisdom and love of our earthly parents makes us wait. But having handed over the matter to the love of the Father we can have an assurance about the issue that we would not otherwise have. The matter is being dealt with, it is being cared for, it is being looked after. God has taken the matter in hand.

This leads John on into a passage which is extremely difficult in its interpretation. It would seem as if John has in mind the fact that prayer is not simply something we offer for ourselves but

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something we offer for others; but what is not quite clear is what John means and who the others are to whom he now refers in the closing verses - what prompted him is not obvious either. It may be something that had happened contemporaneously, but the result certainly is a passage on which commentators are very divided. I think the key thought, the key word that divides the opinions of commentators is the word 'brother'. Is John referring to those who are brothers in the sense of Christians? Or, is he referring simply to those who are brothers, using that word as a term of affection? This determines what we are to understand by 'life' and 'death' the words which follow. Does the 'life' refer to physical life, or does it refer to spiritual i.e. eternal life? Again what does the word 'death' mean? Is this physical death or is it spiritual death? Two leading evangelical commentators take completely different points of view. John Stott assumes that the word 'brother' is not to be taken as referring to a Christian and therefore that the word 'life' refers to spiritual life and the word 'death' refers to spiritual death. The only sin that could lead to that is what our Lord described as sinning against the Holy Ghost. And this of course is not one isolated act and it is certainly not a sin that a Christian can be guilty of but a persistent and a deliberate rejection of the truth which of course will lead a man to a final rejection of Christ. Dr. Griffith Thomas on the other hand assumes that the word 'brother' is referring to somebody who is a Christian and therefore the life that is given is physical life, and the death that a person can be brought down to is a physical death. A sin which is a sin unto death is a persistent attitude that could create such problems in the life of the Church that God's reaction might be that the only way to solve the problem would be to remove the believer from the earthly scene. This is not, of course, to cast the believer into Hell but rather to take them home to glory a bit sooner than they might have anticipated. Whatever the interpretation is John is reminding us of two things. First of all that we are to pray for others: and the second is that our prayer is to be effective, that it will have results in the lives of others. As the words put it so simply "Prayer moves the arm that moves the world to bring salvation down." And all this is the privilege and the experience of the Christian to whom the way of access is now open and to whom the answers are now certain.

What a fantastic life this is to which we are called! The tragedy is so many of us fail to value it or experience it as God means us to.

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FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD

Passage studied I John 5:18-21

15th March, 1972

THE LIFE ON WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BASED

We come now to our final study in this Epistle which we have titled "THE FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD". After the introductory verses the Epistle divided itself, we found, into three distinct sections. First of all we considered THE LIGHT IN WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BATHED; and then secondly, THE LOVE BY WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BOUND; and then finally, THE LIFE ON WHICH THE FELLOWSHIP IS BASED OR BUILT. In this final section which covers the fifth chapter we noticed first of all, THE ACCEPTANCE WE MUST MAKE OF THIS LIFE; and then secondly, THE ASSURANCE WE CAN HAVE OF THIS LIFE. And under this second heading our last study dealt with: 1. THE DIRECTION IN WHICH FAITH WILL LOOK and for our final study covering these three last verses of the Epistle we take as our sub-title:-

2. THE CONVICTION WITH WHICH FAITH CAN SPEAK

Here we have, what one commentator has called, "the three triumphant certainties" with which John ends his letter. Each is introduced by the words "we know". The first certainty of which John now speaks centres round:-

A. THE SECURITY OF THE CHRISTIAN'S EXPERIENCE

And to grasp this we take the translation found in the R.S.V. and followed by J.B. Phillips and the New English Bible, and taking this translation of v.18 "We know that any one born of God does not sin, but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him." We find that there are two strands of thought here. First of all there is a reminder of:-

(a) That perfection to which the Christian will aspire "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not" - does not sin. We have already faced this kind of statement and stressed the significance of the use by John of the present tense, implying that to those who by the new birth are now the possessors of the divine nature, sin is no longer the pleasurable, the natural, the desirable thing to do; that what used to be enjoyed is now enjoyed no longer. John is writing here of the persistent, habitual, continual indulgence in a sin that is no longer contemplated with any degree of tolerance by the Christian. As we illustrated earlier on in our studies, if a pig and a sheep fell into a muddy bog, while the pig would wallow in it the sheep would struggle to get out. This is the conception that John has in mind here - and yet, is it not the realisation of how high the standard is that keeps so many people back from becoming Christians? They are justly and legitimately afraid that they couldn't keep it up! Indeed, is it not a fact that very often those who are not Christians have a much fairer and clearer picture of what is required of a Christian than sometimes those who bear the name of Christ? But that fear of that inability to attain to the perfection which would be required of the Christian and, indeed, to which the Christian will aspire, to that fear John has the answer with another reminder, and this reminder is of:-

(b) That protection of which the Christian is assured "but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him." How wonderfully this changes the whole line of thought! In the A.V. it would seem as if the Christian had to keep himself - that would be indeed a miserable prospect; but if the Christian is somebody who is going to be kept by Christ what a difference that makes to the whole outlook, and the whole prospect ahead. I have on my bookshelves a

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book entitled "Saved and Kept" by Dr. F. B. Meyer. What a tremendous truth this is to lay hold of - that He who saved us by His death will keep us by His power. No wonder J. B. Phillips translates this verse "he is in the charge of God's own Son and the evil one must keep his distance". Years ago I remember hearing the story of a small boy who went to school for the first time; he was very small and very timid and another much bigger boy made his life miserable by bullying him. But one day the small boy's big brother heard of the situation that had developed and determined to do something about it, and so the next day at school when the big bully appeared so did the big brother and the big bully had to retreat. Indeed, I remember being told that when the big brother stood in front of his small brother and challenged the big bully to come on the boys standing around all started to laugh. The big brother wondered why they were laughing and then turned to see that his small brother was peeping round him and shaking his little fist at the big bully. Like the old negro who was being taunted about his conversion with his tormentor saying scathingly "so, Sambo, you got de mastery ober de debil". The old negro replied, "no, I ain't got de mastery ober de debil but I's got de Master ober de debil" and that's exactly it. I love that old chorus which says, "Kept by the power of God. Kept by the power of God. Day by day, come what may Kept by the power of God."

The first certainty with which St. John ends this tremendous Epistle concerns the security of the Christian's experience. The second certainty is stated in v.19 and here the certainty of which John is writing centres round the thought of:-

B. THE IDENTITY OF THE CHRISTIAN'S EXPERIENCE

v.19 reads "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the power of the evil one." Here again there are two strands of thought. First of all:-

(a) The source from which the Christian's life is derived "We know that we are of God." The Greek reads literally "out of God" just as a stream flowing out of a spring derives its waters from the spring so the Christian life is derived from the very heart of God Himself. Hence the affinity that exists between Christian and Christian because we are all sharers in the same life, derived from the same source. Hence also the affinity that exists between the Christian and his Lord, for we are partakers of the divine nature and there is now a tremendous sense of oneness of mind and outlook, of thought, of aspiration between the Christian and his God. "We know that we are of God." What a tremendous assertion to make but it is made, it is an absolute certainty. John is convinced about it. But just because of that basic affinity between Christian and Christian, and between Christian and his God, John also speaks of:-

(b) The sphere from which the Christian's life is released and that sphere is the world and the power that rules over it. If the Christian can say "we know that we are of God" he also recognises the fact that "the whole world is in the power of the evil one". The word translated in the A.V. as wickedness is personalised in other translations as "the evil one". John Stott in his commentary makes a note of the word lieth as if to suggest that the world is there under the power of the evil one unaware, unperturbed, unconscious almost of its condition and without any desire what ever to move. This is a grim truth, but it is a truth that is stated again and again in the New Testament that if a person is not a Christian then their lives are under the authority and the power of Satan, and let us remember that Satan so often does appear as "an angel of light". This is the teaching of the New Testament: and the power of the evil one is a power of which people may be quite unaware until they seek to escape from it then they realise how strongly they are held in the grip of forces that are against Christ. Just as if somebody is drifting down a stream or drifting with the tide and they are unaware of the fact until they turn and try to swim against it and then they discover just how strong the current really is, so Paul writing to the Colossian church in Colossians 1:13 writes of the Christian as one whom God "hath delivered from the power of

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darkness, and hath translated into the kingdom of his dear Son" A change of nation as well as a change of nature: a change of master, of sovereign: a Christian is now under the authority of "God's dear Son" and He has taken over from "the evil one". But of course it is not simply the power which controls the world from which the Christian has been released but the whole pattern of life which is followed and pursued by the world. The world's language, the world's standards, the world's values - all these are something that the Christian has been released from. There is something unmistakably different about a Christian, recognised by others and recognised immediately by other Christians.

The third assertion that John makes in these closing verses centres round his certainty of:-

C. THE REALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN'S EXPERIENCE

There is nothing phoney about it, there is nothing illusory about it; and so John speaks of two aspects of this reality. First of all in v.20 he speaks of:-

(a) The historical reality "We know that the Son of God has come" These words were written by one who had companied with that living Lord, and he says we know that the Son of God has come. The basis of our faith lies in historical facts, in historical events, in historical and real people. The basis of the Christian faith is not a philosophy that has been imagined or thought out, or worked out by men, but something that has been revealed by God, carried through by God. How glad I am that this is so. Facts, not feelings, are the foundation upon which my faith will rest. But if there is the historical reality which lies at the very heart of my Christian faith and experience, there is also:-

(b) The continual reality The new life received gives us the capacity to know the reality of the grace of God experimentally in our own lives. "We know that the Son of God has come and we know that he has given us understanding to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." There is a reality about the Christian experience that is as true and as real as any other form of reality. It may be something which the natural man cannot see but the Christian can and does see it; and this new realm of reality into which the Christian has entered is the ultimate, and the true, and the abiding, and the eternal reality. If I could phrase it, it is "the real reality". And so with growing insight into the mind of God and a deepening experience of the grace of God the Christian lives a life of whose reality there is no doubt at all. The temptation may come to me from time to time to doubt but that does not alter the fact that it is real. This is life as it was meant to be lived - in fellowship with God and in fellowship with other believers.

The light in which the fellowship is bathed; the love with which the fellowship is bound; the life on which the fellowship is based. What a fantastic fellowship this is! What an amazing life we are called to live!

And then comes the final postscript, words which may very well be the last words chronologically penned in the New Testament "Little children, keep yourselves from idols". One wonders why this particular statement is made. Was it possible that John had suddenly recalled where they were living in Ephesus. In Ephesus where the great temple to the goddess Diana stood, one of the seven wonders of the world. He suddenly thinks of the pressures that they would know and of the perils that they would face, and then he gives them the precept that they should heed "Be on your guard, my dear children, against every false god!" I have described the fellowship see that you don't allow anything to endanger it." And so this great epistle ends with a note of affection and a counsel of warning - "My dear children, be on your guard, against every false god!"

The Second Epistle of John

by the Rev. George B. Duncan, M.A.

Passage studied - Second John20th March, 1968

This is a letter that reflects the pastoral care of an old minister for his flock, for whether this was written to a single lady and her little children or to a Church and those that were members of the Church, they were members apparently of the flock over which the aged apostle had oversight and in which he took a great concern. We have here another personal letter only this time the author is John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. There are three changing themes in this epistle. At the beginning there is a great deal said about truth; then the theme switches in vv. 5 and 6 to love; and then in vv. 7-11 to error. In v.4 there is a rather lovely phrase "I rejoiced greatly" and so we have:-

A. THE DELIGHT HE FINDS IN THEM

"I rejoiced greatly" The bond that was binding the pastor to the flock was the bond of love v.1. "to the elect lady whom I love in the truth" and here we have a love that was able to delight in, and to rejoice over the lives entrusted to its care. It wasn't just that he was happy about them, he really was thrilled about them. Not only was this the delight of the love that was in the heart of John, the apostle, but also others loved this group too, whether it was a family group or a family group in the sense of a fellowship of Christians. And the basis of all this rejoicing had to do with the truth that had come to them in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You remember how Jesus Christ said "I am the way, the truth, and the life" Now two things obviously had made the apostle very delighted as he considered this group of Christians. The first was that:-

(a) The truth had been learned v.1. he speaks of knowing the truth. v.2. he speaks of the truth dwelling in us, or receiving the truth. It is interesting to note that the word that John chooses here to define the gospel is the truth, and that truth is Christ. Do we want to know the truth about man; about God; about sin; about salvation; about the life to come? Do we? Well, listen to Christ, "He is the truth." Here we have a group of people who had learned the truth. When you and I come to see the truth as it is in Christ and we listen to Him then we are listening to somebody who is right and anybody who disagrees with Him is wrong. It is not just a matter of bad and good, it is a matter of truth and error, and Jesus Christ is the truth. If we want to know the truth we have got to know Him: if we want to learn the truth then we must listen to Him. This is of course what our Lord said about Himself, and it is this sense of the truth that John has in mind. These folks were those who had come face to face with the truth as it is in Christ and had welcomed it - not it but Him. John speaks in v.2. of the truth "which dwelleth in us and shall be with us for ever." While the form in which the message of the gospel is conveyed may need to be adjusted to meet the modern mind, the content must not be changed because the truth is eternal and unchanging. Christian faith is not opposed to knowledge but is based upon it. Not only was the truth something that had been learned but:-

(b) The truth was being lived v.4. "I rejoiced greatly that I found some of thy children walking in the truth" Now that analogy of a walk suggests progress. Conversion is something that happens but it is only a beginning. It is not enough to be converted: it is essential to be converted but it is not enough. Having learned the truth, having welcomed the truth, having received the truth, having been permeated by the truth, we have got to walk in the truth, we have got to go on ever more deeply into the truth of God. The Christian is walking in the truth, walking in Christ, and He is the very environment in which we live. This is what these folk were doing - the truth had been learned,

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the truth was being lived. These were the folk that caused the heart of the old minister to thrill and to thank the God of grace and mercy upon every remembrance of them. Here is the apostle, here is the little group of Christians, and he says - I am absolutely thrilled with you, I am thankful for you, I am rejoicing. Is this true of us? Are we the kind of Christians that our minister is thankful for? The delight he finds in them - and this all emerges around their relationship to the truth, the gospel, the Lord who is the gospel, the one who says "I am the truth. The truth had been learned and the truth was being lived. The delight he finds in them, and then secondly:-

B. THE DESIRE HE HAS FOR THEM

Having said in v.4 "I rejoiced", in v.5 he goes on "and now, I beseech" or I beg, and the theme moves from truth to love. While there was so much to delight his heart the apostle was alert to a possible weakness that their faith and the truth that they had learned should be all head and no heart, and that is just about as bad as to be all heart and no head. You need both actually - head and heart. Christian truth in the full significance of the word, the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, is more than simply a creed, a belief, a truth grasped, and so in the verses here where the theme is love, the apostle speaks of:-

(a) The love that truth includes The truth of the gospel is not simply concerned with a new relationship to God through Christ but with new resources in Christ; not simply a creed to believe but a Christ to possess - and that Christ is love; He is God and therefore He is love. "I beseech you" I beg you "that we love one another." In the Christian meaning of love there may be an affection for, but there is essentially an evaluation of another person. The Christian values other people tremendously. In his earlier epistle I John 3:14 the apostle says, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." That is to say the evidence of the new life is the new love. This is what John is concerned about for this wonderful group of Christians - he longs that they should evidence and demonstrate the love that truth includes. This is exactly what our Lord said in John 13 vv.34 and 35 "A new commandment I give unto you by this shall all men know love one to another." The hallmark of a valid Christian experience is a new love - a love for Christ; a love for people, a love for the world for which Christ died; and this is the great longing in the heart of this old minister for his people that they should experience the love that truth includes. He also wants them to know:-

(b) The life that love involves v.6. "And this is love, that we walk after his commandments." The life that love involves is the life of obedience, an obedience that love so gladly and willingly gives. Obedience to God is another hallmark of the Christian. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them he it is that loveth me." Not simply mental apprehension but personal allegiance - the truth and the love dominating, transforming, controlling every moment, every motive, every matter in their lives. What a desire! This is setting the standard tremendously high but then love always seeks perfection. Two young folk expecting their first baby go to infinite pains - the knitting, the preparation of the room, the little nursery, the cot - everything has got to be just perfect. It is exactly the same here - here is a man who loves his flock and he has only got one standard for them and that is perfection. He is not content for them just to have it in their heads; he wants it in their lives. The delight he finds in them: the desire he has for them: and then finally:-

C. THE DEMANDS THAT HE ASKS OF THEM

The demand really comes in v.8 "Look to yourselves that we lose not those things which we have wrought but that we receive a full reward." His demand then is for watchfulness. There are two things involved here; first of all:-

(a) An anxiety that he feels v.8 "that we lose not those things which we have wrought." J. B. Phillips translates it "don't throw away all the labour that has been spent on you" They have done so well, they have grown so much, and he is concerned lest it should be wasted. I wonder how much labour has been spent on you and me. If we could see

with the eye of God down the spiritual road that we have travelled we would find there were people who had prayed for us; Sunday School teachers who had prepared lessons for us; leaders who had helped us; ministers praying and enduring costly experiences in order that a message could be preached out of a heart that knew what it was talking about. Don't throw away all the labour that has been spent on you. The most important thing in the life of any Christian is to maintain a right relationship with the Lord, day by day. Yesterday's relationship will not suffice for today: today's relationship won't suffice for tomorrow. If we get out of touch with the Lord then tragedy is round the corner, and this is what John is concerned about and with very good reason. As far as these Christians were concerned the anxiety he feels is due to:-

(b) An activity he fears v.7 "For many deceivers an anti-christ." v.9-11 "Whosoever transgresseth" or goes ahead or beyond "and abideth not is a partaker of his evil deeds." Anything that takes away from Christ's person, His work, His words, His worth is to be guarded against; even a Christian friend can come between you and your Lord. Have you realised that? Be on your guard. The apostle was worried because there were people going around presenting an incomplete view of Christ. Anything that clouds the vision; anything that spoils the fellowship; anything that detracts from the glory, the sufficiency, the wonder, the person of Christ - anything, anyone, keep it out. That is what the apostle said - get rid of it. He says, v.10, if these men come don't have them in your home; they were denying the incarnation. Don't have them in your home. This is wise counsel for the minister - don't have them in your pulpit. Why? Because they don't present Christ that's why.

This is the demand that says - be on your guard, be alert, be watchful, take heed to yourselves, look to yourselves. Is there anything taking away from Christ in your life?

John ends with rather a lovely touch v.12 "Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink." Letters are wonderful things. You can say quite a lot in letters but sometimes there is so much you want to say that you can't put into a letter. Here we see the apostle John and his heart is so full, and so he says in v.12b "I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full." Then he adds the final greeting "The children of thy elect sister greet thee." This is one of the phrases which makes some commentators think that John is writing from one church to another - to an elect lady from an elect sister - that he is really using imagery in order to describe two churches. Somehow or other I have the feeling that it was just to a lady, and John was unburdening his heart; the heart of an old minister to a group of Christians - maybe just a family - whom he held in great esteem and loved with great affection.

So here we have the heart of an old minister for his flock - The delight he finds in them; the desire he has for them; and the demand he asks of them.

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Hymns. 36, 566.

The Third Epistle of John

by the Rev. George B. Duncan, M.A.

Passage studied - Third John27th March, 1968A PEEP BEHIND THE SCENES

The writer is identified as being the same writer of the Second Epistle, calling himself "the elder" or the "old man". This is another personal letter and unmistakably so in that it is obviously written to "the wellbeloved Gaius". As in our previous study in II John the phrase "the elder" may simply be a title of affection which John the apostle had been given and which he was happy to acknowledge. We might well call it "The Old Minister". So here we find an old minister with his pen in his hand writing to a Christian in membership with the Church. It is worth noting in passing that there may come a time in our lives when writing is the only ministry we still have; but how few Christians seem to think of using their pens for their Lord. The writing of letters and the writing of post cards can be a real ministry in itself under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

There are three people involved in this epistle. The first - Gaius. We know nothing specifically about him beyond what is written in this epistle but some people think that he may be the Gaius referred to in Romans 16:23 and that this letter may have been written to him at Corinth. Corinth was not so far away from Ephesus where John, the apostle, is thought to have lived and from which this epistle may have been written. Ships would travel constantly and frequently across the narrow strip of sea. There is a reference to hospitality in this letter and in view of the fact that in Romans 16:23 Paul describes the Gaius there as "Gaius mine host" it is just possible that this may be the man. We know nothing specifically about Diotrophes, referred to in v.10, apart from what is to be deduced from the letter. It is possible that he was either a prominent member of the Church or maybe somebody holding office, or even a minister. Whether he held office or not certainly he was a man who wanted position and power. Demetrius, referred to in v.12, is in all probability the person who bore the letter, and the letter may have been in part a commendation of Demetrius to Gaius and to the Church. There is of course another reference to a Demetrius in Acts 19:24 - the silversmith who caused the riot at Ephesus when Paul first went there. It is just possible, and indeed a rather lovely thought, that the persecutor then may now have become the Christian, like Paul. Certainly the man John is seeking to commend in his letter is possibly the leader of a group of Christians who were engaged in active evangelism and were travelling round the churches.

From our point of view of study this letter is of value in that we get certain glimpses of Church life in these long distant days. There are four things we find here:-

A. FIDELITY TO THE TRUTH

In the opening verses of this letter we find the same emphasis on the truth as we found in the second epistle. The Christian is not simply concerned with good and evil but with truth and error. The Christian's concept of the truth is of course the truth as it is in Christ, and so we find in vv. 1,3,4,8 and 12 references to "The Truth". This is of course basic to all Christian living. A Christian is right, the unconverted man is wrong; and therefore the Christian way of living, as far as it is lived in the truth, is right and the other man's way of living is wrong. A Christian need make no apologies for this. But it is worth noting two things concerning the truth, and the relations of the Christians here to it. I want us to note:-

- (a) John's delight in the progress of Gaius v.3. "I rejoiced greatly" v.4. "I have no greater joy" Gaius was one who was "walking in the

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truth" that is to say there was movement and progress and direction about his life. There was growth and development. This was not something claimed by Gaius but it was something recognised by the Church and reported on to John. This ought to be true of every Christian. It is true of physical growth, it ought to be true in spiritual growth. How often when we meet a child we have not seen for many years, or many months, we say, "how you have grown" I wonder if we ever think of saying the same thing about Christians we meet whom we have not met for many days - "how they have grown" The second thing to note here is:

(b) John's desire for the prosperity of Gaius v.2. "Beloved I pray" and he is praying for his physical health, and in doing so he pays an unconscious tribute to his spiritual well-being, for John's prayer is that the physical condition of Gaius should be as good as his spiritual condition. I recall vividly the Rev. Alexander Frazer of Tain saying that if this prayer was answered in a congregation what a scraggy lot of folk there would be in the Church because so many of us are terribly underdeveloped and undernourished spiritually while we may be blooming as far as physical health is concerned. Here is the first mark then of the early Church. Fidelity to the truth, secondly:-

B. CHARITY FOR THE CHURCH

Where there is life there will be love, and that love is expressed here in terms of hospitality. It is worth noting two things about Gaius:-

(a) The welcome to others shown by him Gaius was apparently a man who had an open house. His house was open to either one or to two groups or kinds of people - "to the brethren" and "to visitors" that is to say either to members of the Church or to strangers passing through. Obviously the immediate application in this epistle is his kindness and hospitality to travelling preachers. Hospitality of this kind used to be exercised very widely in Christian homes, and still is. I have vivid memories of visiting such a home in Falkirk many years ago where I stayed with a Mr. Macpherson. Their visitors book, when I thumbed its pages seemed to contain the signatures, and names and addresses, of almost every Christian preacher of note in the country. This kindness of Gaius was not only appreciated by those who enjoyed it but talked about by them. But John makes a further point. He stresses not only the fact of the welcome to others shown by Gaius but that:-

(b) The witness of others was shared by Gaius He was in a sense helping the cause. In v.6 he was helping them on their way, v.8 he was co-operating with them; that is to say, by this indirect kind of Christian service he was identifying himself with the redemptive purpose and will of God. As in times of war those actively engaged in combat depend upon others behind the scenes so in Christian work, and if we are not actually actively engaged in the front line of the battle there are other ways in which we can share. John reminds Gaius of the sacrifice that such Christians have willingly made and how his own generosity, in some ways, is not only an appreciation but also a compensation to them for this. The Christians apparently made a point of never taking anything for their material support from the unconverted people whom they were seeking to win. Here we may have an indication that in evangelistic crusades we should not have collections.

C. HOSTILITY TO THE WORK

vv. 9-10. There is a reference here to another letter which John obviously feared might be repressed knowing the nature of the man to whom he had written. Diotrephes has become proverbial in ecclesiastical circles as representing a certain type of man who craves position and power for its own sake. Because of this he could brook no rival and was hostile to John and hostile to anyone, or anything, that had any connection with John. It is worth noting:-

(a) The motive in this man's heart He is described as a man "who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them" Here was a man in the Church for the sake of the position he could occupy and the power he could exercise. Alas this is a tragic possibility and a not uncommon occurrence. There are those who are covetous of position, there are

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those who demand that others should submit to their will. They will brook no rival and tolerate no competitors: they are very often ruthless and discourteous in their attitude to any who might seem to threaten their power. They want to be what Dr. Paul Rees calls "a big duck in a small puddle" or as somebody else described "they are quite happy to play in the band as long as they are allowed to bang the big drum". The motive in this man's heart was all wrong, and therefore:-

(b) The manner of his life was wrong He had no room for anyone else, and so in v.10b we read of his intolerance and unkindness to others. John was not wanted, these visiting workers were not wanted, and anybody who tried to be kind to them incurred the extreme displeasure of Diotrephes. He would seem to be a thoroughly unpleasant kind of a person to have around. May God deliver us from ever being like him.

D. INTEGRITY IN THE LIFE

v.v. 11 and 12. Here is the fourth mark of the life of the early Church as envisaged by this old minister. The Church had to demonstrate the life of its risen Lord, and so we see here:-

(a) The obligation laid upon them They are told to "follow that which is good". The contrast here is the contrast of that which is good and lovely as compared with the life of Diotrephes who is selfish and self-seeking. The authentic evidence of the new life is a new life, and so John writes here "He that doeth good is of God", and if the characteristics of our life are not good then the validity of our Christian profession may well be brought into question.

(b) The illustration sent to them Demetrius is an illustration of the kind of quality of life that the Christian ought to live. As I said in the introduction it is a matter of speculation, and some imagination, as to who this man really was but the interesting thing about him is the host's wholesale attestation of his worth. His quality is witnessed from three sources:- (a) He has a good report of all men. Wherever he goes good reports follow; appreciation of his real worth is willingly granted. (b) The Truth, that is to say Christ Himself, would appear to have owned him as His servant setting His seal upon his witness and ministry. And the third source (c) Ourselves - that is to say John himself gives his own personal reference and testimony to the quality of this man.

And so the old minister closes his letter and the curtains are drawn but we have been able to have just a little peep behind the scenes into the life of the early Church.

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Par. 61, Hy. 199, Par. 35, Hy. 430 vv. 1,3,4.